

# A Haunting Endearment

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## Darkcat18

Star Wars Sequel Trilogy

Complete



# **A Haunting Endearment**

**Darkcat18**

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## Summary

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### Description:

In a small town, on the coast of Canada, a two hundred year old Victorian mansion sits rotting. Tales of the Skywalker family, once owners of the grand mansion, abound, especially since Ben Solo's strange disappearance in 1885. There were many rumors of what happened, but the man was never found, dead or alive.

Rey, as part of the hazing process for her sorority, has to walk inside the house and say the name Ben Solo five times. Really, in her opinion, she got off easy. When she enters the house, however, her entire life changes.

# Chapter 1

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## Chapter 1

“Town legend states that the old abandoned Victorian manor on the outskirts of town, known as Varykino, is haunted. The history of the mansion is tragic. The manor was originally commissioned by a successful sea merchant, Captain Anakin Skywalker, to be built as a wedding gift to his bride, Padme Naberrie, in the early-nineteenth century.

“Sadly, Mrs. Skywalker would never see the completion of their home, as she died in their first year of marriage after giving birth to twins, Luke and Leia. Anakin, in his grief, left his children in the care of his household staff, with the house half completed, and returned to sea. His ship was later wrecked with all souls onboard lost. The family tragedy does not stop there.

“The heir of the estate, Luke Skywalker, disappeared years later with his young wife during a horse ride. Their bodies were never found. Leia Skywalker, now the sole family survivor, inherited the house along with Anakin’s fortune, a very uncommon occurrence in those days for an unmarried woman.

“Leia used her inherited wealth to complete Varykino and later married Han Solo, a local fisherman. They had a son, named Ben. Life for the Solo family was happy in those early years, the couple raising their son in Varykino for many years without incident. But it was not to last.

“One night, Han and Ben had a falling out, and shortly thereafter Han died under mysterious circumstances. Rumors spread through the town of Ben’s involvement in his father’s death. His fiancé, Bazine Netal, called off their pending nuptials due to society pressure. This devastated the young Solo, now heir to Varykino. He remained inconsolable, even to his mother, for many years. Following the death of Han and the hastily cancelled engagement, the Solo family became pariahs in the community, as Mrs. Solo remained steadfast in her certainty of Ben’s innocence in the death of her husband.

“Several years passed and, after several failed marriage proposals, it seemed the young heir would remain a bachelor. Skywalker men had always been known for their obsessive love, and the mystery revolving around the elder Solo’s death kept many young women wary of the man. Ben eventually became a recluse, never leaving the manor grounds, and rumors began to spread of his practicing witchcraft and other ways of the occult. The young heir’s eccentric ways fueled the gossip in more than one town. While Leia was away visiting friends in the autumn of 1885, Ben was visited by a man of suspicious character, known simply as Snoke.

“Snoke sold Ben a gilded mirror that was said to show a person their soul mate under the light of the harvest moon. This is where our story gets freaky. The night of the harvest moon came and with it, the disappearance of Ben Solo. The next morning his servants found a pool of blood in front of the mirror and bloody fingerprints on the glass. Ben Solo was never found alive or dead.

"In her grief, Leia, who could no longer live in the house that seemed to bring nothing but tragedy, sold the estate. The house passed through many hands over the years until it was finally abandoned thirty years ago. They say the manor is haunted by the soul of Ben Solo, who never found peace or his soulmate.

"Weird and violent things happened in the house over the years, especially in front of the mirror that still hangs in the front hall to this day. These days the house is only visited by the truly brave. Local high school kids or college girls are dared to go in front of the mirror on the night of the Harvest Moon and say 'Ben' five times to see if they are his soulmate or 'lost bride' as she is known today," Rose said, finishing the forlorn tale.

"Okay," Rey said. "Creepy story, but what does that have to do with me joining the sorority?"

All eyes turned to Rey and her stomach clenched in apprehension as Rose answered, "Because Rey, that is how you pass initiation to the house."

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Rey got out of the car, looking at the abandoned house, hanging on the edge of a cliff as waves crashed down below. She felt a shiver of foreboding run down her spine at the thought of entering the house. She tried laughing it off, reminding herself that ghosts weren't real. All she had to do was walk inside, say the name five times and then leave. Honestly, it was an easier hazing process than she'd expected.

She jumped when a hand clapped onto her shoulder.

"Whoa," laughed Kaydel. "Someone's not scared, are they?"

Rey forced a laugh. "Of course not."

Kaydel gave Rey a slight shove. "Then get to it. Some of us have Calculus homework to get back to."

Rey hesitantly took a few steps towards the house. The years unoccupied had left it dilapidated, purple and black paint peeling off the side of the house, revealing rotted wood underneath, and several areas of the roof caving in. Rey wasn't entirely sure it was safe to even enter the house.

She jumped again when a hand lightly touched her. Putting a hand to her chest, Rey fought to slow her now racing heart.

"You scared me!" Rey whispered.

"I'm sorry!" Rose whispered back. She glanced behind her, taking Rey by the elbow and walking a few more steps towards the house. "It's really not that bad. Just walk in, say the name and get out. The house is pretty creepy, but the whole thing only takes thirty seconds."

"Get a move on!" One of the other girls, Jessika, laughed as she yelled towards Rey.

Rey glanced behind her, and then back at the house. "So, you did this?"

Rose nodded. "Oh yeah. They do it every year. Nothing ever happens."

Rey took a deep breath. "Okay."

She forced herself to walk forward, reminding herself once more that ghosts weren't real. She knew quite a few kids in high school who loved shows like Ghost Hunters and Buzzfeed Unsolved, but she had always thought they were stupid. People died. That was it. Who would want to stick around just to haunt some college students stupid enough to enter an obviously unsafe house?

Try as she might, however, Rey could not shake the feeling that she was making a mistake, that she should turn around and leave immediately. Grinding her teeth together, she walked through the cast iron gate, which creaked eerily as it closed behind her. Rey struggled to hide the shiver that passed through her body.

*You're being stupid*, she thought, her shoes crunching on the gravel and other debris littering the walkway to the house.

Her gaze snapped up to the second floor as she saw something move. Narrowing her eyes, she reminded herself probably just a trick of the light. Her hands balled at her sides, Rey walked faster, determined to get this over with so she could go back to the sorority house and laugh about how stupid she was being.

She placed her foot on the first step, hoping it wouldn't give way underneath her. The wood was bowed in several places with obvious rot. Rey teetered on one of the steps and reached out to grab the wooden handrail. She was nearly to the top of the precarious porch steps when she hissed in pain, pulling her finger back. She looked over at the handrail, only then seeing the sharp splinter of wood sticking out.

She stuck her finger in her mouth, the copper taste of blood filling her mouth. Pulling her finger out, she examined it, hoping she hadn't just contracted some rare disease from the dilapidated home. Deciding she could tend to her finger later, she hastily stepped up to the door. Grasping the glass knob, Rey twisted it and pushed. At first the door merely groaned, remaining closed. Rey pushed harder, ramming her shoulder against the unforgiving wood, and then nearly fell on her face when the door abruptly swung open.

The interior yawned black before her and another shiver ran down her spine. She felt the hair on the back of her neck stand on end and nearly turned around and fled. Before she could act on the instinct, however, she thought of the endless teasing she'd face if she did.

Squaring her shoulders, Rey stepped into the darkness, stopping just inside the door. As her eyes began to adjust, she took in her surroundings. Wallpaper, clearly once expensive, was peeling off the wall and several steps of the once grand staircase had rotted away entirely. Movement in the corner of her eye had Rey once more whipping her head around.

She gasped before she realized that she was looking at her own reflection. She laughed in relief, again calling herself silly for letting that story get to her. Realizing this must be the mirror she was meant to look into, Rey stepped forward, swallowing the insistent foreboding feeling of impending doom, to gaze at her reflection. She narrowed her eyes, a crease forming between her brow as she stared. Something felt off. When she realized what it was, she gasped, whipping her head around to stare behind her.

The reflection did not show a dilapidated home. There was no peeling wallpaper, no rotted wood, or moth-eaten furniture, no cobwebs in the corners. In fact, the room in the reflection



appeared to be entirely new. Rey slowly turned back towards the mirror, hoping to find she was wrong, that it had been some trick of light. The reflection had not changed, however. Rey shook her head, looking behind her once more and then back towards the mirror.

*Perhaps it's not really a mirror*, she thought. She stepped closer, peering around the gilded edge on either side to see if there was some mechanism behind it. Seeing nothing, she stood once more in front of it. Narrowing her eyes, she leaned towards the mirror, trying to peer through it, to see if there was a picture taped behind the glass. She raised a hand, watching her reflection do the same, and pressed her fingers to the glass.

In the blink of an eye the reflection changed. Rey frowned, confusion halting all thought. Perhaps it really had been nothing more than a trick of the light.

Laughing softly to herself, Rey decided to just leave. She would tell her friends she said the name and be done with it. They'd never know the difference. Turning, she halted, frowning down at the previously rotted console below the mirror. It looked brand new, the wood shining as if freshly oiled, a vase of flowers in the center. She turned back towards the stairs to see what else had changed and then screamed, her hand flying to her mouth.

In front of her was a man, dressed as if out of a Charles Dickens novel. He was tall and very broad, pale with dark hair and dark eyes. He wore a black, three-piece suit. The outer coat, currently unbuttoned, ended at his knees. Rey could see what appeared to be the chain of a pocket watch leading from his trousers up to his black waistcoat. Underneath he wore a dark gray button-down shirt with a red ascot tied around his neck.

"How did — where did — who —" Rey spluttered as she tried to ask ten different questions at once, hand now over her racing heart. The man simply watched her, his head slightly cocked to the side, lips upturned at the corners, as if he found her confusion amusing.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?" Rey asked.

When he spoke, Rey shivered at his deep timbre. "I believe I'm the one who should ask how you got here. This is my home after all."

When Rey simply stared dumbly, her mouth hanging open, the man sighed.

"To answer your first question, my name is Ben Solo."

## Chapter 2

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### Chapter 2

Rey stared at the man, mind racing. It was a joke. It had to be. The girls were playing a joke on her. That was the real hazing. Hire a man to pretend to be the ghost of Ben Solo to freak her out and then laugh when she runs out screaming.

“Liar,” she breathed.

The man, the so-called Ben Solo, raised an eyebrow. “I beg your pardon?”

“You’re lying.” Rey looked around her, trying to reconcile the pristine condition of the home with the crumbling mess of rot she had walked into. Maybe that had been an illusion as well. Some sort of backdrop that was pulled up when she wasn’t looking. “How did you do it?”

Though the man’s face remained impassive, the glittering of amusement in his eyes confirmed that this was nothing more than an elaborate joke.

“The house? How did you do it? How did you make it look rotting before and perfectly fine now?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

He took a step towards her and Rey threw up her hands.

“Stop!” Though she knew it was a joke, her heart continued to race. “I know they hired you to trick me so just drop the act.”

“You think I’m playacting?” The corners of his mouth turned upwards, but if anything, the smile only added to Rey’s discomfiture.

“Cut the bullshit!”

The man’s eyebrows rose high. “That sort of language is very unbecoming of a lady.” His eyes traveled down her body and Rey repressed a shudder at the ravenous look in the man’s eyes. “Though one could hardly call you a lady in so little clothing.”

Rey shook her head. “Whatever.” She started backing away, hand reaching back to find the doorknob, not wanting to put her back to the man. “I’m leaving. This is stupid.”

Her hand connected with the doorknob and she twisted it, pulling it open — much easier than she had previously — and stumbling out onto the porch. Only then did she turn, hurrying down the steps, trying to ignore the prickling of warning on the back of her neck. She resisted the urge to look behind as she rushed towards her friends.

“You guys are assholes!” she called out. They kept talking as if she hadn’t said anything. She fumed as she opened the gate again.

“Hello—”

Rey cut off as she suddenly smacked into something and fell backwards onto the ground.

“What the hell?” Rey looked in front of her, seeing nothing to smack into. This was getting ridiculous. Her friends continued to chatter away as if she hadn’t just fallen on her ass in front of them. Probably part of the trick.

“Very funny, you guys!” Rey stood up, getting angrier each second they continued the charade. “You can cut the act now! I know you’re just playing a joke on me!”

She took a step forward and smacked her face on something. She screamed in frustration as pain lanced through her nose and up her head.

“I’m done! Quick fucking around and take down whatever weird glass barrier you put up so we can leave.”

Rose turned to look at her. “Do you guys think Rey’s ok? She’s been in there awhile.”

Jessika snorted. “Please. What would have happened to her? She’s probably just dicking with us.”

A wrinkle formed between Rose’s eyes. “I don’t know. That’s not really Rey’s style.”

Rey rolled her eyes. “Ha ha. Nice one. You all got me. I’m terrified. Can we leave now?”

“I’m getting annoyed,” Kaydel said. “I have calculus homework.”

Jessika rolled her eyes. “Gee really? This is the first I’m hearing of it.”

Rey pushed her hands out, trying to find the barrier. When her hands met resistance, she pushed against it, hoping to find some give in it. If her friends were going to continue pretending she didn’t exist then she was going to just kick the thing down. Drawing her foot up, she kicked forward. When the sole of her shoe hit resistance however, she ended up knocked on her ass again.

“As amusing as this is,” a voice drawled, “I’m afraid it’s rather useless of you to continue trying to escape.”

Rey looked behind her as she got up, finding the man pretending to be Ben Solo staring down at her. Now that he was closer, she realized he was massive. He had to be over six feet tall, at least, and his shoulders so wide she wondered if he played football. Maybe he was some weird jock/nerd combo. Football player by day and thespian by night.

“You’re not fooling me. I know you’re just acting, so you can drop the old-timey speak.”

“I’m afraid I don’t know to what you are referring.” The man’s eyes glittered with amusement.

“I’m going in there, guys.”

Rey and the man both turned towards Rose as she broke away from the group and walked towards the gate. Rey frowned as she realized the cast iron looked freshly painted, though the same eerie creak could be heard when Rose opened it.

“Rose,” Rey hissed. “I don’t know what game you guys are playing —”

Rey jumped out of the way as Rose walked quickly towards her, showing no signs of moving aside. The man also took a step to the side, his hands behind his back as he then turned around and followed Rose towards the front door.

Rey gasped, her eyes pinned on the house. The man halted and turned back towards her.

“Yes, it is a rather beautiful house, though I say so myself.”

Rey slowly shook her head, disbelieving. The home in front of her might as well have been a new build. The roof was intact, the paint looked freshly applied, and there was no sign of rot anywhere.

The man smirked faintly, obviously enjoying her confusion as she hurried past him, the initial panic flooding back into her. She took the steps two at a time up the porch and ran into the house after Rose.

“Rey!” Rose whisper-yelled her name, standing several steps inside the doorway.

“Rose,” Rey said, her voice wavering. “What is going on?”

“Rey!” Rose whispered again, a frantic note in her voice as she turned in a circle.

Rey stamped her foot, something she hadn’t done... maybe ever. “Cut it out! You’re scaring me. Ok? Happy? I’m sufficiently scared. You’ve had your fun. Can we go now? I don’t even care anymore about the trick —”

Rose pulled out her phone, still pretending she didn’t see or hear Rey, tapping at it before holding it up to her ear. Rey rolled her eyes, pulling her phone out, waiting for it to ring. Except it didn’t. Rey watched with growing terror as Rose frowned, pulling the phone away from her ear and frowning down at the screen.

Rey walked over to Rose, caught between extreme anger and extreme fear. She raised a hand to grab Rose’s arm, but it went straight through when she tried to grasp it.

Rey screamed. She swallowed, her heart racing, sweat breaking out on her upper lip as she started to panic, reaching once, twice more for her friend. Each time her hand went through Rose’s arm as if it wasn’t there.

“No, no, no, no, no,” Rey began hyperventilating, swiping her hand over and over through Rose’s arm. “This is fake. It’s fake. It’s just an illusion. It’s fake.”

“As I said before,” Rey whipped her head back to find the man she had forgotten about standing just inside the doorway, “it’s rather useless to keep trying.”

“Who are you?” Rey asked, her voice shaking.

“I already told you my name. I’m Ben Solo.”

Rey shook her head. “Ben Solo’s been dead or missing or whatever for over a hundred and thirty years. This is a prank.”

Rey gasped as Rose walked through her and out the door.

“Clearly,” he said dryly.

“Where am I?”

Ben opened his hands. "You're my guest."

Rey shook her head, slowly at first and then faster as her panic crested. "No. No this is just a prank."

Pushing the man aside, Rey ran back out the door. Rose had reached the girls again and they stood huddled together.

"You guys! This isn't funny anymore!" Rey screamed as she ran towards the gate. Not wishing to smack her face again, she stopped just short of it, pulling her hands up and smacking against the barrier.

They continued to ignore her as they talked amongst themselves, throwing nervous glances over their shoulders towards the house.

Rey pounded against the barrier, ignoring the pain in her hands, as she continued screaming. "Stop it! This isn't funny! Turn around!" As she shouted the last one, her eyes started watering. With each moment that passed, the panic inside her multiplied. Whatever shred of dignity she had remaining became a memory as she kicked and pounded at the barrier, tears streaming down her face.

"They can't hear you."

Rey whipped around, once again finding the man calling himself Ben Solo standing several paces back.

"Why? What is this place?"

Ben shrugged his shoulders. "I'm not entirely sure, to be perfectly honest."

"How can you not know? You've been here for over a hundred and thirty years."

"Whatever this place is," Ben said, looking around him, "I arrived here after touching the mirror in the front hall."

"The mirror," Rey whispered, only then remembering the story and the strange way the reflection had changed when she touched it.

Rey took off, racing quickly back towards the house, leaping up the stairs and shoving open the door. She stopped in the hall, noting that the dilapidated house was still present in the reflection. She reached her hand up and pressed her fingertips against the glass.

Nothing happened.

She swallowed, inhaling shakily, and pressed her entire palm against the glass.

Nothing happened.

"No, no, no, no, no." Rey pressed both hands against the glass. "No!" She smacked the glass, causing the mirror to rattle, but otherwise changing nothing.

"If it were that simple, do you really believe I'd still be here?"

Ignoring the man calmly watching her have a mental breakdown, Rey picked up the vase of flowers, walking to the other side of the hall and hurling it at the mirrored glass. The vase shattered, but the mirror remained entirely unscathed, water sliding down in rivulets.

She shook her head, beginning to hyperventilate, glancing frantically around for another item to throw. She saw the curved end of an umbrella in a stand by the door and picked it up. Holding it as if it were a baseball bat, Rey screamed as she swung it around. The tip bounced off the mirror, jolting Rey's arm back, but leaving the mirror otherwise unharmed. Now yelling so loudly she sounded feral, she held the umbrella as if it were a javelin and hurled the tip towards the mirror as hard as she could. Once more the umbrella bounced off the mirror, leaving it unbroken.

"If you think you're doing anything that I have not already previously tried, then you'll find yourself quite mistaken."

Rey whirled around to Ben Solo, whose eyebrows rose in surprise at the anger directed towards him.

"You!" Rey said, walking towards him. She attempted to shove him, but the man barely moved an inch, so she poked him in the chest instead. "You did this! This is your fault!"

"Did I?" He cocked his head to the side, his expression condescending. "I forced you to touch the mirror?"

Rey faltered. "Well... no. But you're keeping me here."

"And how am I doing this, then?"

Rey narrowed her eyes at the look of condescending amusement she found in his. "If I knew that, then I wouldn't be standing here."

"Perhaps you had best run out to your friends once more, just to be sure."

"You're an asshole."

Ben's eyes hardened. "And you are an ill-bred woman to be using such language."

Rey ignored him as she ran around him and back out the door. Her breath caught as she saw her friends returning to their cars.

Running at full tilt, Rey screamed after them. "Wait! You can't leave me here! Please!"

Rose looked back, a worried expression on her face, and Rey thought for a moment that she had been heard until one of the girls inside the car said something and Rose got in and closed the door. Rey reached the gate, now closed, as the cars started and headlights went on. Rey wrapped her hands around the cast iron spindles, shaking the gate as she screamed, tears once more streaming down her face.

As the cars left her behind, Rey slowly slid to the ground, her hands still wrapped around the spindles of the fence as she watched the taillights disappear.

## Chapter 3

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### Chapter 3

*This can't be happening. It's a dream. It's just a dream. I'll wake up and find it isn't real.*

Rey stared into the darkness, unaware that she grew cold, that her fingers were starting to cramp from gripping the cast iron so tightly. She merely sat, her face pressed between the spindles, unwilling or unable to believe that this was really happening.

People did not just go to other planes of existence. Her life wasn't science fiction. Sure, quantum mechanics had theories for a multiverse, but it was just that. Just theories. There was no definitive proof yet. The concept was still basically science fiction at this point.

*It's not real. It's just a dream. It's just a dream.*

Dimly, Rey heard the crunch of shoes on gravel approaching.

"I realize that it is rather late, but with all the excitement I'm afraid I have not yet had my dinner."

She didn't answer, still staring into the darkness, willing Rose to come back. Willing herself to wake up.

"I have taken the liberty of setting the table for two. You'll need to change, of course. You can hardly come dressed as you are."

Rey closed her eyes before turning to look at Ben. "What?"

Ben sighed, sounding exasperated. "Really, I'm rather hungry and your continued theatrics are wearing thin. You must change into something more suitable if you're to dine with me."

She exhaled sharply. "My theatrics?"

Straightening his cuff, he replied, "Yes. I understand this experience has been taxing, but it hardly warrants staring into the abyss for a quarter hour. It's time to stop and join me for dinner."

Rey laughed, a hysterical edge to the sound. "I'm sorry that my *theatrics* are interfering with your schedule, but I never said I wanted dinner and I don't have anything to change into."

Ben narrowed his eyes, irritation shining through them. "There is clothing available to you in the bedroom which borders mine."

"What?" She had been left behind by her friends and this stranger was talking to her about dinner and clothes. The situation would have been comical had she not had adrenaline flooding her system.

Ben scoffed. "Really, now, you're just being difficult. There is a bedroom which you will find has everything a proper young woman could need. Stop being a child and get dressed."

Rey ground her jaw. "Why can't I wear what I have on?"

He sneered at her. "I've known whores who've dressed more modest than you."

Irritation flashed through her, her hands curling into fists. "Newsflash, Rip Van Winkle, but the world is different than it was in 1885. My clothes are fine and I'm not changing."

"Oh yes." Ben's voice was sharp, but his eyes were hot as they traveled down her body. A shiver of fear, and maybe something else, ran down her spine. "I've seen the way women parade themselves about. Every harvest moon some hussy enters my house in naught but a few scraps of cloth. But as you are now living on my side of the mirror, you shall dress in a manner befitting a lady."

"You're insane."

In a snap, Ben lunged at Rey, grasping her by the arm, yanking her up, and pulling her behind him towards the house.

She stumbled, unable to get her footing as she tried wrenching her arm out of Ben's grasp.

"Let go of me, asshole!"

He stopped abruptly, turning around and grasping her jaw while the hand on her arm tightened its grip.

"That is the second time you've insulted me with such vile language. If you do so again, you will regret it." Rey swallowed, eyes widening as her arm began to go numb in his grasp. The anger radiating off him was terrifying, as was the look in his eyes. "Do I make myself clear?" He spoke softly, but the intensity was enough to have Rey nodding her head.

"Very well."

He let go of her face before turning around once more and walking briskly into the house and up the stairs, pulling Rey behind him. She was by no means a short girl, but Ben was so tall she had to skip to keep up with him. Her quads began burning at the pace they took up the staircase — Ben taking two stairs at a time — and her shoulder burned from being wrenched. Down a short hallway, Ben opened a door and threw Rey inside. She stumbled but managed to hold onto her footing as she ran a hand down her arm.

"You'll find everything you need in the wardrobe."

Rey rubbed a hand over her aching shoulder, gently massaging the muscles.

"I'm not changing."

Ben's eyes hardened. "You will change or you will not eat."

Rey's first instinct was to do what the man asked, but the stress of the evening caused anger to surge in place of good sense. "I'm not your doll or your slave. You don't get to dictate how I dress."

Ben's eyes flashed. "Very well. Perhaps hunger will change your mind."

He turned to leave.

"I'll be back in the morning," he said before he closed the door.



“What?” Rey hurried to the door but before she could grab the knob, she heard the turn of a key. Her breath caught and she started frantically twisting the knob.

“Perhaps by then you’ll be willing to dress properly.” His voice came through the door, sounding almost amused.

Rey banged on the door. “Let me out of here! You can’t keep me in here!”

When she received no answer, she banged once more, her hand aching with each strike on the door. She knew it was useless to keep banging, but she couldn’t stop the panic from pouring out of her. She was trapped. Trapped in this nightmare.

*It isn’t real. It isn’t real. It isn’t real...*

After a time, she slid down the door, her hands and face pressed against the wood. The problem was that it felt real. The wood grain against her cheek, the ache in her shoulder where she was dragged up to the room, the smell of kerosene from the hurricane lamp next to the bed. She closed her eyes, listening for sounds of movement. She had eaten a late lunch that day. She had class straight through the lunch hour, so she typically didn’t eat until at least three, but the thought of waiting until morning to eat again triggered a more familiar sort of panic. She took a deep breath in, trying to keep herself calm as memories rose in her mind like a photo album. A little girl, left alone for days. A little girl taken from parents so coked out they didn’t even react to their little girl screaming. Foster family after foster family, providing the bare minimum to keep her BMI where it needed to be.

Her breath hitched and she opened her eyes, pressing away from the door. She didn’t need breathing exercises. She needed to get out of here. She stood and looked at the room. It was only illuminated by the flame of the hurricane lamp, a much lower light than she was used to. She frowned at the lamp, wondering why Ben would have lit a lamp in a guest room.

She shook her head. She didn’t care. She just wanted out of here. She looked around the room once more, and her eyes caught on the window. She hurried over, looking out and noting how high she was off the ground. Maybe she could create some sort of rope out of the blankets and sheets. It worked in movies.

She flipped the lock open and pulled. The window didn’t budge. She frowned, squatting down to get a better angle. The thing probably hadn’t been opened in a hundred some-odd years. She placed the whole side of her hand under the lip and squatted down to get better leverage.

When she pushed up, however, the window still refused to budge. Rey huffed, her face heating from exertion as she pushed upward with all her strength. Her hand slipped off and she fell, banging her head against the windowsill.

“Fuck!”

She slapped her hand against the wall as she rubbed the side of her head.

“FUCK!”

She kicked her foot out, connecting the sole of her shoe with the wall.

Breathing quickly, panic rising once more, she stood up, wondering what the chances were that she could break the window and escape without Ben hearing her. Probably not great.

Rey looked around the room once more, looking for some other means of escape or something to help her pry open the window. She stood up, going to the side tables, hoping to find something — a letter opener — anything that could be used to jimmy open the window or pick the lock on the door. One of the skills she'd picked up in foster care had been how to pick a lock. She silently kicked herself for choosing a hairstyle that day that didn't need bobby pins.

Opening the drawers, she found nothing. Not even paper. They were completely empty. Rey looked around at the rest of the furniture in the room. There was a chest of drawers, over which hung a small mirror, a small writing desk with a single drawer and wooden chair, and a tall wooden wardrobe. Aside from the four-poster bed, that was it. The room wasn't really that large. Honestly, her dorm was probably only slightly smaller, though at least she wasn't sharing this one.

Rey walked over to the writing desk, opening the drawer. She found pieces of paper, a quill, and a pot of ink. Wonderful. Perhaps she could write a letter to the police. She picked up the quill, pressing it against her finger. It was marginally sharp, but she wondered how well it would hold up if it were jammed into a man's neck. Probably not well.

She set the quill back down and closed the drawer, walking over to the chest of drawers. Opening each, she found what she thought might be undergarments. She thought back to when Ben Solo went missing. 1885. So, Victorian undergarments then. She pulled one out, holding it up. A pair of bloomers, looking like out of style shorts with ruffles at the end. She nearly laughed when she saw the open crotch area.

*That must make it easy to do your business while wearing petticoats.*

Rey tossed the garment back into the drawer and continued opening the drawers below. Nothing but more undergarments. She sighed, irritated, as she closed the last drawer before walking over to the wardrobe.

Opening it, Rey was met with an assortment of dresses. She fingered them, not able to distinguish much in the low light, though the fabrics felt nicer than anything she'd ever owned. She reached back behind the dresses, hoping to find Narnia and disappointed that all she found was wood. Rey closed the doors, hard enough that the sound echoed, and opened a drawer at the bottom of the wardrobe. Inside she found several corsets.

She held one up, examining it. It tied in the back. How was she meant to dress herself in a corset that tied in the back? She tossed it back into the drawer and kicked it shut.

The man was insane. There was no way for her to dress herself and she'd be damned if she let him do it. He was probably just a pervert anyway, jacking off to the "hussies" that came to his house every year.

The reality that there was no way to escape, and no means of defending herself, hit Rey as she stood in the middle of the room. She wandered back over to the window. Gazing out she could see lights in the distance, make out headlights from cars on the roads, the circling light of the lighthouse. Why could she see all this? If she was on another plane, shouldn't everything be different?

She frowned, wondering what Ben made of all these modern conveniences, if he even understood what he was seeing.

Then she scoffed at herself for wondering what her captor thought. Who cared?

She sighed, pushing away from the window and going over to the bed. She pulled out her phone, noting her battery was running low, and checked the time. Late dinner? She couldn't have been in the room for more than an hour at this point and it was nearly midnight. Who ate dinner that late?

Rey held the power button down, wincing at a sudden sting. Letting go of the phone, she walked over to the lamp, holding her hand into the light.

She had completely forgotten about cutting her finger on the way into the house. She had probably reopened the wound with all her pounding, the adrenaline keeping her from feeling it until now.

She frowned as she watched a drop of blood form. There was something... something important she was forgetting, she could feel it. But what?

Rey gasped when she remembered the circumstances of Ben's disappearance. There had been a pool of blood and blood on the mirror. Rey had also touched the mirror with a bloody finger. She held her finger up, watching the drop of blood trace its way down her finger. Was that how she got here? Because she had touched the mirror with blood on her finger?

If that was how she arrived here, then how did she leave? She had already touched the mirror again, and nothing had come of it.

She began pacing. There had to be a way out. If blood was the conduit into this plane, then she just needed to figure out the conduit out of it. She ignored the fact that Ben Solo had been here for over a hundred and thirty years. He was from 1885. She was an engineering undergrad. She understood physics better than he did. She read *The Feynman Lectures on Physics* for fun in high school. She would figure a way out.

Rey paced, her mind whirring with ideas and theories on how best to escape, until she yawned so widely that she had to stop for fear she'd accidentally run into a bedpost. She had no idea what time it was, her phone turned off and no clock in the room, but she figured it had to be well past midnight.

She sighed as she turned to the bed. It felt a little like losing to actually sleep in it, but she didn't relish the thought of sleeping on hardwood floors. Besides, if she was going to figure out her escape then she needed to be well rested.

Walking over to the bed, Rey toed her shoes off, unbuttoning her pants. There was probably a nightshirt in one of those drawers, but Rey didn't feel like trying to find it. She could sleep in her t-shirt. Plus, it felt like admitting defeat if she actually put on any of those Victorian clothes.

She crawled under the covers, surprised at how comfortable the bed was. She curled up on her side, ignoring her stomach's sudden growling, and closed her eyes.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow she would find a way out. *It's not real. It's just a dream.* Or maybe she would simply wake up.

## Chapter 4

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### Chapter 4

Rey's eyes flew open at the sound of a lock turning. It took her a moment to realize why she wasn't in her dorm and when she did, her terror returned in full force. She quickly sat up, holding the blankets up to her chin. Ben had already seen her in her t-shirt, but knowing she had no pants on, regardless of the fact he could not tell, made her feel vulnerable, the moment more intimate.

The door opened and Ben walked in, taking in her unbrushed hair, fingers clutching at her blankets.

"Are you ready to dress like a lady?"

Perhaps it was the lack of sleep — since it had only been a few hours since she had drifted off — or perhaps the stress and hunger simply made her forget that the man had essentially kidnapped her and locked her in a room, but before Rey's good sense could catch up with her mouth, she spat, "Go fuck yourself."

Ben's demeanor changed in a flash and Rey's eyes widened at the fury in his eyes as he charged forward three steps, raising his arm and whipping the back of his hand across her cheek.

Rey gasped and fell to the side from the force of the blow, her hand on her cheek as pain bloomed across the entire right side of her face. Rey had never been smacked like this. It was not a stinging slap across the cheek. This felt as if her cheekbones had been fractured. The pain radiated around the back of her head, her eye watering. She would be surprised if she didn't develop a bruise.

She looked back at Ben, who was straightening his jacket, running a hand through his hair to put errant strands back into place.

Looking up at her, completely unrepentant, he said, "I did warn you that should you insult me again, you would regret it. I'll return at lunchtime."

Rey gasped, wanting to say something, to protest, but before she could form a sentence Ben was gone and the door was locked once more.

Rey laid back down, her hand cupping her now throbbing cheek. She tried to fall back to sleep but the pain in her head wouldn't let her. Instead she spent her time wishing she had brought her purse into the house with her so she would have had some aspirin to take.

Eventually she became resigned to the fact that she was not going to get back to sleep. Aside from the throbbing in her head, her window was facing east, so the sun was shining directly onto her bed.

Getting out of bed, Rey walked to the adjoining bathroom, praying for running water. She hadn't given it more than a cursory glance the previous evening, since there had been no light.

In the light of day, Rey was surprised to find it wasn't all that different from a modern bathroom, lack of shower aside. There was a clawfoot tub underneath the window, a sink with what appeared to be plumbing attached to it, and a toilet, the tank high above with a pull chain. After doing her business and confirming that the house had running water when she pulled the chain, Rey walked over to the sink to wash her hands.

Only as she was washing her hands did she realize how thirsty she was. She looked around for a cup or something else which could be used to drink from, but finding nothing, she cupped her hands together.

Once her thirst had been dealt with, Rey returned to her room, looking around and taking it in in the light of day. Altogether it was a pretty room, filled with pretty furniture, but to Rey it might as well be the rotting corpse of a room that it was in Rey's time. To her it felt like a tomb.

She wandered to the window, squinting against the sunlight, still noting cars on the road in the distance. Sighing, she walked over to the desk. Since the only thing in the room was paper, a quill, and ink, Rey decided to try her hand at writing with a quill to distract her from her rumbling stomach.

As time passed, Rey's stomach became more insistent. She walked back into the bathroom to try to fill her stomach with water. It was a poor substitute, but at least it kept the hunger at bay for the few minutes it took for the water to leave her stomach.

The time seemed endless. Rey thought of turning her phone back on to check the time, but if she ever figured a way out of whatever weird dimension she was in, she wanted to make sure she had a working phone.

Surely it had to be near lunchtime. Rey stood from the desk once more, one page almost entirely black from her scrawling over and over again. She had a limited supply of paper so Rey did her best to make it last, having no clue how long she would be kept in this room with nothing else to occupy her time.

Walking over to the wardrobe, Rey opened the doors, once more peering in at the dresses hanging there. They were certainly beautiful. An array of colors and fabrics, all clearly expensive. As her stomach growled once more, Rey reached out towards one of the dresses.

Before she could remove it from the hanger, there was the sound of footsteps heading towards her door. Rey snatched her hand back, quickly shutting the doors, and hurried back to the desk. She held the quill over the page, her hand shaking as the lock turned and the door opened.

Rey breathed deeply and willed herself into a mask of calm before turning to face Ben.

Ben's eyes narrowed as he saw she was still in her modern clothing.

"You look rather pale." Ben's voice was mocking as cocked his head, lips twitching as Rey swallowed. "When was the last time that you ate?"

When Rey didn't answer, Ben's tone sharpened. "Answer me."

"Yesterday." Rey's voice came out in a croak. She was beginning to wonder why she had thought it was a good idea to refuse to wear the dresses. Her face still ached from being hit.

Ben's eyes moved to survey her face. "Your face will be bruised I'm afraid." His eyes returned to hers. "I trust you learned your lesson."

When Rey didn't respond, indignation mixing into her fear, Ben raised his eyebrows, warning in his eyes.

"Yes."

Rey winced internally at how small and scared she sounded, knowing it probably made him happy to have her cowed so easily.

"And yet," Ben's voice took on a dangerous quality, "I find you still in these abhorrent clothes instead of the fine dresses of a lady."

Rey began shaking her head. "Please."

Ben turned and walked to the door again. "I'll return at supper."

Rey stood quickly, fear of more hunger-filled hours yawning before her. "Please! No wait!" The door closed and locked before Rey could turn the knob. "Please! I can't get dressed by myself! I need help with the corset!"

She banged her hand against the door, tears blurring her vision as fear and hunger both gnawed at her.

Her cries went unanswered and Rey eventually slid down the door, pulling her knees up, laying her head down, and sobbing.

Eventually she got up, walking into the bathroom to splash cold water on her face. Crying had probably not been the best thing for her to do, as her cheek was now back to throbbing.

She walked out to the mirror, gasping as she took in her appearance. Ben was right. She was pale. Her hair was also a complete disaster, sticking out in all different directions, and the side of her face was swollen, purple starting to show high on her cheek where the force of the blow had landed.

Rey wandered listlessly over to her unmade bed. Pulling her t-shirt over her head and shucking off her jeans, she curled up onto her side, pulling the covers up, and forcing her eyes closed. Maybe she could sleep away the remaining time until dinner.

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Rey startled awake, disoriented. It took a few moments for the events of the last twenty-four hours to return to her. Looking out the window, she saw that the sun was much closer to the horizon than it was when she fell asleep. She had been asleep for hours.

She swallowed. Panic unfurled, winding its way down her spine, her heartbeat picking up at the thought of Ben returning. She had no idea when dinner was or even what the current time was. She exhaled sharply as a hunger pain struck her.

She swung her legs over the side of the bed, standing up and then stumbling as a wave of dizziness hit her. This was stupid. It had only been twenty-four hours since her last meal. She shouldn't be so weak. She chose to ignore the fact that she was used to eating about every two hours.

Inhaling deeply, Rey decided her pride wasn't worth another missed meal. Though it felt like a defeat against her captor, survival won out. Rey walked over to the chest of drawers, opening several, pulling out items at random.

She had absolutely no idea which clothes went where. She started to hyperventilate, her eyes filling with tears at the thought of another missed meal. She had no one to help her, no one to even tie her corset. How would she do this herself?

Rey gasped, holding the garments to her chest as she heard the lock turn.

The door opened and Ben walked in. "Now then —"

He stopped abruptly, seeing her basically naked before him, clothes clutched to her chest. Her long legs were completely exposed and Rey watched as Ben's eyes darkened. His gaze traveled slowly up her legs to her face.

She tried to keep her voice steady as she said simply, "I don't know how to dress in these clothes." Her voice wavered on the last word as tears spilled over her eyes. "Please. I... I need help. I can't tie the corset on my own. Please."

It tore at her pride to plead with her captor, but the panic, weakness, and hunger were a compelling combination.

Ben eyes left her face, once more traveling down her body.

Rey resisted the urge to shiver.

Without speaking Ben walked slowly over to her. Rey tensed as he drew near, her cheek twinging in memory of being hit. As he drew near, Rey could see that his pupils were blown wide, desire obvious. She clutched the clothes tighter in her fist.

He finally stopped a foot away from her, forcing her to either look at his chest or tilt her head upward.

Rey tensed once more when his hand reached out to grab the clothes from her, his eyes holding hers.

Glancing down at the garment, Ben said softly, "This is a chemise. You wear it underneath your corset."

He glanced down at Rey, now wearing nothing more than her bra and underwear.

"You'll have to remove your undergarments."

Rey inhaled sharply, her eyes widening.

Ben's lip twitched as faint amusement entered his expression.

"I'll of course turn around." He handed the chemise back to her and turned around.

Rey stayed facing him, worried that if she turned around he would sneak a look at her. She quickly removed her underwear, and immediately pulled the chemise up to her waist before removing her bra and sliding her arms through the straps. Looking down at herself, it looked almost as if she were wearing a summer jumpsuit, the legs ending just below her knee.

Rey closed her eyes, forcing herself to speak. "I-I'm done."

Ben turned back around and Rey resolutely lifted her head. His gaze once more traveled down her, and she saw his jaw tick. He walked over to the wardrobe, pulling down a skirt and bringing it over.

“Next you need your petticoat.”

Rey held out her hand but Ben shook his head. “It ties in the back.”

Rey took a calming breath in. “I can tie it myself.”

“Turn around.”

Ben’s eyes hardened as she started to resist. As if in reminder, her stomach growled. Rey ground her jaw together, telling her pride to shut it as she turned around. Her ears strained as she tried to listen for Ben’s approach. Rey tensed as his hand lightly grazed her shoulder before pulling his fingers down her arm. Goosebumps followed the trail of his fingers before he simply said, “Step into it.”

Rey looked down and behind her, thinking this was the most difficult way he could have had her step into the skirt. His hand reached out to lightly grasp her arm, his thumb drawing circles in her skin. Only then did she realize that Ben had done this on purpose, so that he would have a reason to touch her. The idea was extremely unsettling.

Rey awkwardly stepped back into the skirt and the hand lifted from her arm to help pull the petticoat over her hips. He pulled the strings tight and tied them. When he was done, he walked over to the drawer at the bottom of the wardrobe and pulled out a corset.

Rey took a deep breath, probably the last one she’d be able to manage once she was strapped into that torture device. Ben walked back over.

“And now the corset. Raise your arms.”

Rey blinked at him. “What?”

“I can hardly have you step into it.”

Rey sighed as she realized he was right and raised her hands.

Ben pulled the corset over her head, moving slowly downward. When the back of his hands grazed her breasts, Rey jumped, certain it was no accident. The idea pissed her off, but once more she reminded herself that her hunger was more pressing than her pride.

Rey turned her back on him without being asked and felt the laces being pulled tight, the ribbing digging into her side. How did women breathe in these things? No wonder they were so thin. They probably couldn’t ever eat anything.

Once Rey was laced into her torture device, Ben’s hands landed on her shoulder as he turned her around.

“Go pick a dress.” His eyes were hungry as he stared at her and Rey again suppressed a shiver as she walked over to the wardrobe. She pretended to ponder the dresses and then pulled one out at random. Walking back over to him, her head held high in the hopes he would not see her fear, she handed him the dress.

“Arms up.”



Rey pulled her arms up once more as Ben pulled the dress over her head, straightening it before tying it in the back.

His hands landed on her shoulder once more as he stepped closer, his front pressed against her back as his hands trailed down her arms. When he spoke, Rey could feel his breath hit her ear.

“Now then, was that so difficult?”

Rey didn’t answer, the humiliation that she had given in to the man hitting her hard.

“I think,” he spoke softly, “that it’s good for lessons to be repetitive. It helps cement the lesson, don’t you agree?”

Rey swallowed. “What do you mean?”

Ben let go of her and stepped back. Rey turned around to see a gleam in his eye. Rey’s eyes widened as she realized his intent.

“No.”

Ben turned on her and walked towards the door.

She hurried towards him, grabbing his arm. “No! Please! I did what you asked!”

Ben turned, looking down at her hand on his arm and then up at her. “And for that I am pleased.”

Grabbing her hand, he easily pulled it off and used it to push her backwards. Rey stumbled, not used to the many layers she now had on. When she regained her balance she ran towards the shutting door, reaching it too late.

Rey pounded on the door. “Please! No! Please! Let me out! I did what you asked!”

“I’ll return in the morning,” was all the response she received.

Tears of frustration and terror rose up inside her.

“I did what you asked!” she screamed, pounding her fists on the door. “Please let me out! I did what you asked!”

She repeated the shouted plea for so long that the side of her hands started to bleed from being repeated pounded against the wood and her voice became hoarse. Eventually, she quieted, tears streaking down her face as she sank to the floor. She had done what he asked, she had pushed away her pride, and he punished her anyway. Rey stayed there, pressed against the door, staring at nothing as her stomach cramped with hunger.

## Chapter 5

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### Chapter 5

Rey woke the next morning as a beam of sunlight struck her eye. Momentarily disoriented, she started to sit up, wincing as pain accompanied the movement. Only then did she realize she had fallen asleep on the floor in front of the door. She had a crick in her neck, and her shoulder and hip throbbed from laying on the wood floor all night.

Rey slowly sat up, twisting her neck back and forth, trying to loosen up her muscles. Standing up proved difficult, the now wrinkled dress's skirts getting caught under her feet. Eventually she crawled over to the bed, grabbing onto one of the posts to give her leverage to stand as she cursed the dress's overabundance of fabric. Once standing, Rey stood there, clinging to the bedpost as another wave of dizziness caused spots to dance before her eyes. She shut them, trying to stop the ground from spinning.

Before she had fully recovered, she heard the lock turn in the door.

"I see you're awake."

Rey tensed at the deep voice, but did not reply.

"You look awful."

Rey whipped her head around to glare at her captor.

"That's what happens when you're left to rot in a room with no food," she spat.

Ben's jaw ticked as annoyance flared in his eyes at her tone. "Well you certainly can't come to breakfast looking like that. Fix your hair."

It was on the tip of Rey's tongue to refuse, but the dizziness reminded her she needed to eat. She took a step towards the bathroom, hanging onto furniture where she could. Once in there, she picked up a comb and looked at herself in the mirror.

Well, Ben wasn't wrong. She did look awful. Her hair was a rat's nest, frizzing out in all directions from days without brushing. Her skin was frightfully pale, the only color the blue, purple, and green bruise on her cheek. Even her lips were nearly white, cracked from dehydration.

Glancing behind her, Rey sighed in relief that Ben had not followed her. She turned back to the faucet, turning it on and cupping her hands to drink. Then she slid the comb underneath to wet it and began attempting to unknot her hair.

The moments ticked by, Rey pausing every few moments to grasp the sink as weakness and dizziness alternated. Panic began winding its way up her spine as time passed. She wouldn't put it past Ben to keep her here until lunch because she had taken too long.

Once her hair was finally free of tangles, Rey stared at herself. She only had the hair tie she had had in her hair when she arrived and there were limited things she could do. She

knew women in the Victorian era wore elaborate updos, but Rey had no idea how to even begin doing her hair like that. Swallowing, she decided to quickly French braid her hair and hope it passed inspection.

When she walked out of the bathroom, Ben was still standing at the door, idly inspecting his nails.

“I-I’m done.” Rey cursed the tremor in her voice.

Ben looked up, tilting his head as he inspected her. Rey’s heart stopped as his lips pressed together, certain he was about to deny her again, before he took a step to the side, out of the doorway, and gestured for her to exit.

Rey swallowed, starting to shake as she carefully walked towards the door. She told herself the shaking was from lack of food. She tensed as she took careful steps past Ben, waiting for him to grab her and throw her back into the room, to deny her food once more.

But he didn’t. She loosed a breath as she crossed the threshold. Placing a shaking hand on the wall, she walked as quickly as she dared towards the stairs. Once at the top, she glanced behind her, startled to find Ben right behind her.

She looked away quickly, grabbing the banister and taking a slow step down. Her legs threatened to give out at any moment as she descended the stairs, using her free hand to hold her skirts up.

Once at the bottom, Rey glanced around her. She had no idea where the dining room or kitchen were. She closed her eyes to gather her strength before turning toward Ben.

“I don’t know where to go.”

Amusement sparkled in Ben’s eyes and irritation rose in Rey that he found her situation amusing. She gripped the banister with white knuckles to avoid saying something stupid.

“Allow me.” Ben held out his arm.

Rey stared. The very last thing she wanted to do was touch this man.

“The offer won’t last, Rey, so I suggest you act quickly.”

Rey’s eyes lifted to Ben’s, the amusement gone from his eyes, irritation now clear.

Slowly, Rey reached a shaking hand out and lightly placed it in the crook of his elbow. Ben placed his other hand on top of hers, leaving her feeling very much trapped. She swallowed against the rising panic.

Ben walked, no longer keeping Rey’s glacial pace, and Rey stumbled to keep up with him, her feet getting tangled in her skirts as she walked quickly, praying she wouldn’t faint before she got to the food.

Leading them through the house, they entered a small dining room with windows overlooking the sea. Rey stared out, begrudgingly admitting it was a beautiful view as Ben pulled out a chair for her at the foot of the table. Rey grasped the table as she sat on a plush dining chair. The back of the chair was a dainty scrollwork of wood and Rey wondered if it would even take the pressure of her leaning against it.

Ben walked out of the dining room through a door. As it swung shut, Rey realized that was the kitchen. Rey tensely watched the door, waiting for Ben to return, to tell her she had to sit there until lunch time as punishment for not doing an elaborate updo, or because she had taken so long to walk down the stairs, or because she had hesitated to take his arm.

After several long moments, the door opened and Ben walked out holding two bowls. He set one down in front of her before taking his place at the head of the table. Rey greedily grabbed the spoon, shoveling the food into her mouth. It wasn't anything special, plain oatmeal with dried fruit on top. It wasn't even that much. The bowl was probably half the size Rey usually ate, and even then, she usually had eggs, toast, and juice with it. At the moment she didn't even care. She barely took the time to chew before swallowing the food. She glanced up, finding a cup of water — she must have missed Ben setting it there — and gulped down half the glass before returning to her oatmeal.

By the time she finished, not more than five minutes had passed. She closed her eyes as she felt some strength returning, along with a healthy dose of nausea. Perhaps she had eaten too quickly. It didn't matter. She wanted more.

Only when she raised her head did she see Ben watching her, his own breakfast as yet untouched, eyes narrowed and lips pressed together. Icy tendrils of dread flew up her spine as he watched her, unspeaking.

Rey swallowed, wincing when her voice came out sounding meek. "Can-Can I please have some more?"

Ben calmly set his spoon down and clasped his hands together. "No."

Rey closed her eyes, attempting to calm the now raging panic flooding her, breathing as deeply as her corset allowed her. Once she felt she had a handle on herself, she opened her eyes.

"Why not?"

Ben answered calmly, but the hint of anger beneath the calm had Rey grasping her skirt to keep her hands from shaking.

"I have never seen a person with such poor table manners. One might think you were raised by wolves and I will not dine with a wolf. Only a woman who shows proper table manners is allowed to eat her fill."

He pushed his own bowl away. "You've rid me of my appetite."

Gesturing to the bowls, he said curtly, "Now, clean this up. I expect the kitchen to be clean before you leave it."

Rey's ears rang as anger weaved its way through her panic. For as romanticized as the Victorian period is, Rey did not care at all for the raging misogyny she had encountered thus far.

Even knowing what the answer would be, and knowing she was treading close to danger by asking at all, Rey asked, "Why do I have to clean the kitchen?"

Ben looked at her like she was an idiot. "Because you're the woman, of course. That's your job as mistress of this household."

Rey clenched her hands together under the table, wanting to chuck her fork at his head.

"I'm not mistress. I'm your prisoner."

Ben narrowed his eyes and Rey sensed he was barely keeping his temper in check. Perhaps she should just clean the kitchen.

"Very well. If you prefer to be my prisoner, then I expect the entire home to be cleaned by sunset. If it does not meet my expectations, then you don't eat."

Rey's mouth fell open. "What?"

Ben cocked his head, smiling maliciously. "If you feel you are nothing more than my prisoner, then I shall treat you as one. Two meager meals per day, working from sunup to sundown, and no leisure time. How does that sound?"

Rey didn't respond, trying to breathe deeply, but only managing to hyperventilate.

"Or," Ben's smile broadened as Rey's eyes snapped to his, "You can be mistress, clean the kitchen now, and join me in the library afterward."

"I shall leave it up to you to decide which you prefer."

He stood, throwing his napkin on the table, and walked out of the dining room.

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Rey contemplated her predicament as she washed the dishes. Upon entering the kitchen she had been relieved to see that it wasn't really that dirty. She sighed, thinking of modern conveniences like dishwashers and liquid soap as she grabbed the bar sitting on the sink along with a rag.

As the sink filled with water, Rey looked out the window. She paused, seeing a latch, and flipped it open. When she pushed, the window opened easily, letting in a nice breeze, though once again Rey wished for the modern convenience of a screen as a fly flew in. Closing the window Rey wondered about her own window, stubbornly refusing to open. Was it a coincidence or had it been tampered with to keep her from climbing out?

Seeing the sink filled, Rey scrubbed the bar of soap on the rag and got to work cleaning the dishes. As she scrubbed she filtered through the events that had transpired to bring her here in the present. The mirror was the cause of this, but how? Rey tried to recollect the story Rose had told her. To be truthful, she hadn't paid that close attention at the time because it had seemed so silly. Now she wished she had taken notes.

What she did recall was Ben had gotten the mirror from a man named... Snake? Soak? Something strange like that. Ben had gotten the mirror because it had promised to show him his soulmate.

Rey frowned at the thought. She already had a working theory about blood being the conduit through the mirror, since there had been a pool of it after Ben disappeared — had come here — and Rey's own hand had been bleeding when she touched the mirror. Why had there been a pool of blood, though? Rey had merely pricked her finger, so clearly you didn't need much. The soulmate part sounded weird to her. Normally she'd dismiss the whole thing

as idiotic, but clearly the mirror wasn't a regular mirror. She didn't really want to contemplate what it meant that she had ended up here via a mirror that shows people their soulmate.

Rey started as a plate slipped out of her hand and splashed back in the water. Picking it back up, she got back to the task at hand. There were many things about this situation that did not add up. If Rey was going to escape, she was going to have to figure out what had happened and why.

Once the dishes were clean, dry, and put away, Rey wiped her now wrinkled hands on the towel and wandered out of the kitchen with no idea where the library was.

She settled for wandering aimlessly through the house, still contemplating the mirror. She was a fan of physics, and quantum mechanics was one possibility she had considered for her degree. She knew of things like alternate dimensions, an infinite universe, but this seemed different. She wasn't fully in another universe. She could see the world outside, see cars and speedboats and people walking dogs on the beaches, but she couldn't leave. She wondered if this was some sort of pocket dimension. She laughed at the notion, knowing it was more the stuff of science fiction than real science theory, but her circumstances didn't exactly line up with the definition of a pocket universe, so... who knows? Maybe she would be the first person to prove that a pocket dimension was a real thing.

Eventually Rey found herself in the doorway of what looked to be the library. She stopped, considering backing away as she saw Ben reading quietly in a chair. Before she could move, however, he looked up. The corners of his mouth twitched as he marked his place in the book and set it aside, rising and walking towards her.

Rey swallowed as the urge to run overtook her. In the back of her mind, she made mental note of the fact that when given a chance, her fight-or-flight instinct tended towards flight. It kind of annoyed her. She'd rather be the sort of person who fought.

Pushing aside those thoughts, Rey concentrated on keeping her posture neutral. Despite her obvious fear prior to breakfast, she wanted now to show no fear to the man. He had hit her. He was scum. He didn't deserve her fear.

Ben slowed as he neared her, his eyes raking over her in a way that made her want to cover up, even though she was wearing an enormous dress with three layers.

Stopping a respectable distance away from her, Ben clasped his hands behind his back.

"Now that you are presentable, it is time to discuss our little predicament."

Rey blinked, frowning in confusion. "You've been here a hundred and thirty years and haven't managed to find a way out. You think women are little better than servants. What could you possibly expect me to do?"

Rey refused to share her knowledge with the man. If she did get out, she would happily leave him behind.

Condescending amusement sparkled behind Ben's eyes, his lips once more twitching upwards. "No. That's not the predicament of which I speak."

Rey shook her head. "Then what?"

“I should think it obvious. I — a bachelor — and you — an unmarried woman without a chaperone — cannot simply live in the same house together. It would be most improper.”

Rey snorted. “Improper? To whom? Give me a break. We’re the only ones here.”

Ben raised his eyebrows. “Be that as it may, we simply cannot remain as we are.”

Rey narrowed her eyes, a sinking feeling in her stomach. “What are you talking about?”

The condescending amusement Rey had noticed in Ben’s eyes now filtered to the rest of his face, his smile sending a chill down Rey’s spine.

“We have to be married, of course.”

## Chapter 6

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### Chapter 6

Rey laughed. It was the only thing she could do, given the circumstances, and the longer she laughed, the harder she laughed. The surprise on Ben's face made her laugh even harder, doubling over as hysteria washed over her. In the back of her mind she wondered if laughing in the face of this man was the smartest thing to do.

Ben's expression darkened, and as Rey finally started to calm she noted the barely concealed rage simmering in his eyes.

Abruptly, Rey's laughter left. She straightened, a frown marring her expression as she eyed him warily.

"You're serious?"

Ben's jaw ticked before he answered.

"Of course, I'm serious," he snapped loudly, causing Rey to jump.

Rey backed away a step, shaking her head. "You're crazy."

Ben's eyes flashed and his hands fisted at his sides. Rey took another step back, but Ben took a step forward.

"Crazy, am I?" His calm voice belied the restless energy emanating from him as he took another step towards her. "You've heard the story. That's why you're here."

A frisson of dread shot through her. "It's just an old town legend."

The corner of Ben's mouth ticked upwards. "Is it? The mirror shows a person's soulmate at the full harvest moon. Year after year scantily clad whores have come to visit, looking in the mirror, speaking my name, touching it, and nothing happens."

Ben advanced another step and Rey resisted the urge to back up further, tilting her head up to meet Ben's eyes.

"Until you."

Rey swallowed as a shiver ran down her spine. Ben raised a hand to cup Rey's injured cheek. She flinched at the contact.

"Now," he spoke softly, "why would the mirror bring you to me if you were not my soulmate?"

Rey took a deep breath, squaring her shoulders as she looked Ben in the eyes. "Would a soulmate starve and beat the object of their affection?"

Ben leaned closer and Rey tensed, the urge to retreat further nearly overwhelming.



“You needed to be taught a lesson,” Ben said, his thumb brushing over Rey’s bruise. “I realize the time from which you come is rife with carousing, debauchery, and promiscuity, but if you are to be my wife you will need unlearn such unbecoming behavior.”

The man was insane. Rey grabbed the hand on her cheek and threw it off.

“Is that what you tell yourself? That you took your anger out on me because I needed training?” Rey scoffed. “If you think I would marry someone like you, you’re in for a nasty surprise.”

Rey took a step back. “I would never marry a man who treats women like property.”

Ben took a step forward, painfully grasping Rey’s wrists when she lifted them to push him away. As he leaned slowly towards her, Rey wriggling her wrists to try to get away, she felt his lips brush her ear.

She shivered as he whispered in her ear. “There are ways of getting you to comply. Perhaps several more days without food?”

He let go of her wrists then and Rey took several stumbling steps backwards until her back hit the wall and she could go no further.

“So you’ll starve me? Is that it? That’s your plan?”

Ben clasped his hands in front of him. “If that is what it takes to break you, then yes, I will starve you.”

“What good am I to you emaciated and weak?” Rey asked, tendrils of fear snaking their way through her mind. She had barely survived a day and a half without food. What would happen if she were starved for longer? How long could the body even survive without food? The answer, she feared, was a long time.

Ben raised his eyebrows. “The choice is yours. You can either marry me, be a loving wife to me and let me lavish you with all the accoutrements befitting the lady of this manor, or...” he drew the word out, clearly relishing her fear. “...I can keep you locked in your room until you agree. Either way, you will be mine.”

Rey swallowed again, her mind racing. Perhaps the smartest course of action was to give in. After all, it’d hardly be a real marriage, since there were only the two of them. She narrowed her eyes when she saw the faint amusement in Ben’s eyes, as if he knew exactly what she was thinking. She hated him and hated the thought of giving him anything. Her breathing grew shallow as she considered the only two bad options she had.

Panic welled up at the thought of being starved. And what would come of her starvation? Nothing. In the end he would get what he wanted anyway. The better option would be to regain her strength and keep a clear head so she could figure a way out of this hell.

Closing her eyes, Rey took a deep breath. “Fine.”

Rey started when Ben grabbed her hand, her eyes flying open. The triumph in his eyes already made her regret the decision.

He placed her hand in the crook of his elbow.

“I knew you’d see reason.”

He walked her over to side table next to the chair he had been reading in when she had entered the room. He grabbed the book off the table and she saw that it was a bible. He held it in the palm of his hand and turned towards her.

“Place your hand on top.”

Rey shook her head, confused. “What?”

Ben exhaled sharply in annoyance. “Obviously we cannot have a traditional marriage ceremony, since we are the only two here. Therefore, we shall improvise by swearing ourselves to each other on the bible. Now, place your hand on top.”

Rey thought about not doing what he said, but the warning in his eyes reminded her of the man she was dealing with.

Taking a deep breath, she slowly placed her hand on top of the book.

“Now then,” Ben said, the corners of his mouth turning upwards, “repeat after me.”

Rey ground her teeth together when he started to speak.

“I, Rey.”

Closing her eyes, still wondering if she had made the right choice, Rey ground out, “I Rey.”

“Take thee, Benjamin.”

“Take thee Benjamin.”

“Look at me.” Ben’s voice was sharp and Rey’s eyes flew open in response.

“To be my husband.”

The corners of his mouth turned up as Rey repeated the words.

“To love, honor, and obey.”

Rey narrowed her eyes, anger burning in her chest as she spoke.

“Until death parts us.”

Rey paused, pressing her lips together. Ben’s eyes narrowed.

“Until death parts us,” he repeated slowly, warning in his voice.

When Rey still didn’t repeat, he grabbed her jaw tightly, forcing her to look at him. “Perhaps I did not wait long enough before feeding you.”

Rey exhaled as fear and anger welled within her. When his grip tightened to the point of pain Rey gasped out the final words.

“Until death parts us.”

Ben relaxed his grip, but didn’t let go of her jaw, instead brushing his thumb across her cheek as he said his own marriage vows. Rey didn’t even hear what he was saying, the sound

of blood rushing through her ears drowning out all other noise. She felt as if she were being buried alive, suffocating with no chance of escape, and tried to remind herself that it wasn't a real marriage. There was no officiant, no license, no witnesses. Once she found a way out, she would simply leave him behind.

Her thoughts were interrupted when Ben grabbed her other cheek and quickly pressed his lips to hers. Rey was so shocked she didn't even try to pull away. Instead her mind raced as a myriad of emotions flooded through her. His lips were softer than she expected. The man was so unyielding, she would have expected his kisses to be equally unyielding. Instead, the kiss could almost be described as tender.

She hated it.

He broke the kiss and pulled back far enough to see Rey's eyes, their faces mere inches apart.

"The marriage had to be sealed with a kiss."

Rey didn't respond, her lips burning as confusion, fear, and anger swirled through her mind.

Ben took a step back, reaching down to grab her hand and pull her with him over to a small settee. After she was seated, he walked over to the bookshelves which lined the wall. Rey watched him warily, wanting to flee, but unsure where she would even go. There was nowhere she could go that Ben could not easily find her. The estate had no forest for her to hide in. The grounds were entirely exposed. And even if she did manage to get away from him, she could hardly live long without food and water.

Ben pulled a book from the shelf and returned. Seating himself next to her, he grabbed her hand and held their clasped hands on his thigh as he opened the book and began to read aloud.

Rey tried to pull her hand away, but Ben's grasp tightened. He never faltered in his reading, but the meaning was clear. Rey was to go nowhere.

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When lunchtime approached, Ben placed a bookmark in the book. Rey didn't even know what book he had been reading from. She had stopped listening hours ago and had instead tried to make plans for her escape. She turned every possible scenario over in her mind, but they all ended the same way, with Ben finding her and punishing her.

"Rey?"

She blinked rapidly as she came out of her musings, turning to find Ben looking at her with what appeared to be a concerned expression. Rey pressed her lips together in irritation.

"Are you well?"

Rey's teeth ground together. "You mean, am I well given that I have just been married to my abuser? Yes, I'm fine."

Rey got no small amount of satisfaction out of watching the concern turn to anger in Ben's eyes, even if she was sure nothing good could come of deliberately angering him.

Ben stood abruptly, pulling his vest down and buttoning his coat.

“It’s time for lunch. Now that you’re my wife, I’ll expect you to do the cooking.”

Rey barked a laugh. “I hate to break it to you, but I don’t know anything about cooking. I can barely boil water and my toast always burns.”

Ben gave a long-suffering sigh, looking upwards. “Very well. I shall have to teach you then.”

“What?”

He looked down at her, offering her his hand to help her rise. Rey looked at it and then stood on her own. Ben narrowed his eyes as he whipped his hand out to grab her hand and place it on his arm.

Without another word, Ben strode out of the library. Given his height and long legs, it was all Rey could do not to fall on her face tripping over her skirts as he walked briskly through the house and into the kitchen.

Rey watched, not truly paying attention, as Ben walked her through the steps of lighting the stove, filling the pot with water. She tried to reconcile this newly nice and helpful Ben, who didn’t respond to her barbs and patiently showed her how to cook, with the man who had starved her and hit her, but she couldn’t. It was as if she were living with Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

Once lunch was prepared, Ben had Rey sit next to him, rather than at the other end of the table, and set about showing her how to eat like a “proper lady”. Rey humored him, too hungry from nearly 48 hours without eating and a meager bowl of oatmeal for breakfast. Her pride could make concessions for food.

When she finished the food on her plate, Rey reached for the spoon to the mashed potatoes. As she grabbed it and began scooping out more onto her plate, Rey waited for Ben to stop her. When he didn’t, she paused and looked at him. He was watching her with faint amusement, as if he knew what she thoughts were running through her mind. Pressing her lips together, Rey narrowed her eyes at him as she put three more spoonfuls of potatoes on her plate. Ben raised his eyebrows, but said nothing, the amusement in his eyes throwing her off.

When she looked down, she saw a veritable mountain of mashed potatoes on her plate. Exhaling, she picked up her spoon and set about eating every last bite. She’d be damned if she let him know she’d scooped out more than she had room for. She’d rather eat until she puked.

When he was done with his own food, Ben set down his fork and leaned back in his chair, clasping his hands on his stomach, watching her. Halfway through the potatoes Rey started to feel uncomfortable. The corset she had on didn’t exactly leave room for a gluttonous amount of mashed potatoes, but she refused to admit she had taken more than she could eat. When she was three quarters of the way through, she could feel the potatoes sticking in her throat, no room for them to go all the way down.

She refused to look at Ben as she continued shoveling potatoes into her mouth.

When she at last finished, she set her fork down and looked at Ben, feeling triumphant. The amusement in his expression, as if he knew precisely how uncomfortable she was, vanished the smile off her face.

“Would you care for more?”

Rey narrowed her eyes and ground her teeth together as she shook her head.

“Very well.” Ben stood, buttoning his coat once more. “After you are finished cleaning up, I expect you to return to the library.”

Rey blinked up at him. “What?”

Ben raised his eyebrows in mock innocence. “Well, we can hardly leave the food out and dishes unwashed. As the lady of the house, your job will entail all the cooking, cleaning, and laundry. Have things changed so much in the twenty-first century?”

Rey could tell he was baiting her, but that didn’t stop the indignation from forcing her to her feet.

“Yes, they have.”

“Hmm.” Ben shrugged. “Then I shall have to work doubly as hard to ensure these ridiculous notions are purged from your mind.”

Without waiting for her response, Ben walked out of the room. Rey stood there for several minutes, seething, hands fisted at her side. When she got out of there, she was never reading Charles Dickens again. In fact, she never wanted to see or hear another word about the Victorian era again.

*Nothing but a bunch of misogynistic assholes.*

Once her anger began to cool, Rey surveyed the spread in front of her, considering her options, none of which had her winning. She wondered if there was a key to her room. Perhaps she could take all the food out of the pantry and carry it in her skirts up to her room and lock Ben out. It didn’t help her in the moment, but the idea did have merit. Would she be forced to come out eventually? Probably. But she could always cross that bridge when she got to it.

Now, however, her best bet was to just clean up the mess, as much as it pained her to do so.

Once everything was cleaned, Rey grabbed a tin of dried fruit and headed for the stairs. It had taken her quite awhile to even get started, but she hoped she could sneak the fruit up to her room without getting caught.

She tip-toed through the house, holding the tin to her chest. She was halfway up the stairs when one of them creaked under her weight. She closed her eyes, hoping it wasn’t loud enough for Ben to have heard. Luck, however, never seemed to be on her side.

“Just where do you think you’re going?”

Rey tensed, keeping her back to him, mind racing.

“I... I need to use the facilities.”

“You mean the same facilities which can be found in the door across from the stairs?”

Rey noted the wry amusement in his voice as her heartrate doubled.

“Oh? Well, since I’m nearly at the top I might as well keep going—”

“Stop.” The sharply spoken word jolted through her, and without meaning to, she paused, her foot halfway to the next step.

“Come back here.”

Rey closed her eyes, breathing deeply through her nose in an effort to slow her now racing heart. She tried turning in such a way that she could quickly attempt to hide the tin of fruit in her skirts, but when Ben’s eyes narrowed, she knew she had failed.

She descended as slowly as she dared down the steps, dread pooling in her stomach.

When she was at the third step, Ben held out his hand, eyes hard.

“Give it to me.”

Rey considered refusing, but the anger in his expression instead had her sighing and slowly placing the tin in his hand.

“Stealing food now?”

His anger seemed barely restrained, which Rey found odd. He had been cordial to her, despite her rudeness, and yet now he was angry? The man’s moods were maddeningly bipolar.

“Gorging yourself on potatoes wasn’t enough? Is your new plan to turn me off by becoming corpulent?”

Now that he said it, Rey wished she had thought of it.

He grabbed her arm and sharply pulled her after him back to the kitchen and towards the pantry. He paused when he saw the kitchen sparkling.

“Well, at least you followed one of my orders without a fuss.”

He opened the pantry and replaced the tin before jerking her arm back towards the library. Rey stumbled several times over her skirts, but Ben didn’t slow until they reached the settee and he all but threw her into it.

She eyed him, waiting for whatever punishment he was about to dole out.

Instead, he sat next to her, grabbed the book he had been reading and opened it to where he had left off. Rey stared, mouth parted, as Ben began reading aloud.

She wasn’t going to be punished? Rey couldn’t figure the man out. He made no sense. One moment he was hitting her for swearing at him, starving her, refusing her a second serving of oatmeal, forcing her into a marriage, and the next he was acting as if he actually cared for her, letting her behavior slide. What game was he playing?

Closing her mouth, Rey looked out the window, keeping her hands firmly clasped on her lap. Now that her stomach was full, she found her eyes drooping under the calming baritone

of Ben's voice. Despite her intention never to leave herself vulnerable before Ben, she couldn't help leaning her head against the back of the couch as she slowly drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter 7

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### Chapter 7

Rey dreamt of her and Ben, not as they were now, two strangers outside of time, but as warriors, battling against one another in a snowy forest with blazing swords glowing red and blue. She dreamt of battling together against faceless men in a blood red room as fire rained down. The dream shifted again and she saw Ben, hand outstretched, eyes pleading as he asked her to join him. She wanted to join him, the pull was strong, and she felt her heart breaking that she couldn't say yes. She could not leave her friends to die. The last thing Rey dreamt before waking was a broken "Please" from a desperate man.

Rey slowly became aware that she was moving, that there were arms holding her close to a chest that smelled of cedar. She blinked her eyes rapidly, confused as the remnants of her dreams slowly faded. Only when she looked up into a pair of dark eyes did she gasp as everything that had happened came flooding back to her.

Rey pushed her hands against Ben's chest, twisting in an attempt to escape his arms.

"Put me down."

Instead of doing as she asked, Ben's grip tightened. The corner of his mouth lifted as he continued up the stairs. Rey's heartrate spiked while her sleep-addled mind attempted to process the moment. She stopped struggling, seeing it was futile, and instead focused on slowing her breathing, trying to calm her mind so that she could think clearly.

Ben reached her room and set her down, turning to close the door behind him.

Rey swallowed, her breathing becoming shallow as the door clicked shut. As awareness of Ben's plans hit her, she glanced around the room quickly, already knowing there was no means of escaping.

He stalked towards her, looking sinister in the moonlit room. Rey froze, her body tensing as she resisted the strong urge to flee, knowing there was nowhere to go.

Ben stopped a foot away from her and Rey's stomach dropped at the ravenous look in his eyes.

He slowly lifted his hands, dragging his fingertips up her arms before landing on her shoulders and pressing them to turn her around.

She tensed when his hands left her shoulders, now lightly dragging his fingers across her shoulders before landing on the top button of her dress. Rey closed her eyes as he started unbuttoning the neat row of buttons down her back. She reminded herself that she would have had to ask him to do it anyway if she had any chance of getting out of her dress.

She tried to focus on developing strategies for avoiding Ben's almost certain advances, but her mind refused to concentrate. When he reached the last button, Ben's hands slid back up to



her shoulders before pushing the fabric down. The dress pooled at her feet as it slipped off, leaving her in her corset, petticoat, and chemise.

Despite still having more skin covered than usual, Rey felt heat rising to her cheeks. When she felt tugging on the laces of the corset, her arms rose up to hug the front of it to her chest. Her breathing grew rapid as she felt the corset loosen.

She jumped when Ben grasped her shoulders and turned her back around. Moonlight poured through the window, reflecting in his near black eyes. The hunger she saw staring back at her made Rey start shaking her head. She took a step backwards, hands still holding her corset to her chest. Ben stepped forward.

"I..." She swallowed when her voice came out a croak. "I can finish undressing myself."

Ben smiled at her, sending a chill of foreboding down her spine. "Surely, having come from a time of such lasciviousness, you are not unaware of how marriages work."

Rey clenched her jaw, trying to hold herself rigid to hide her shaking. She took another step back, shaking her head as her back hit a wall.

"I'm not having sex with you."

Ben's eyes narrowed slightly as he stalked towards her once more, his voice deeper than she had heard it as he spoke. "The marriage cannot remain unconsummated, otherwise it would not be real."

Rey pressed herself further against the wall, hugging her corset tighter against herself as Ben invaded her space.

"It's not real," she said, her voice shaking despite her best effort to sound firm.

In the moonlight, Rey could see Ben's eyes flash. She flinched, waiting for him to retaliate, her heart beating so fast she was starting to feel faint. The moment stretched out, Rey nearly hyperventilating as her mind raced, trying to find a way out of the situation.

Ben was so much larger and stronger than she was. Though she was by no means a short woman, Ben towered over her. There was no way she could overpower him. Even if she could overpower him, the problem that had plagued her the entire time remained: where would she even go to escape? There was nowhere to go. If she resisted, she had no doubt he would retaliate, but the thought of meekly surrendering made her stomach turn. There were no good options.

*Think. There has to be a way out of this.*

Rey flinched again when Ben wrapped his hands around her wrists. Her eyes flew open as he pulled her hands away, the corset dropping down, the petticoat keeping it from falling away completely. He pinned her hands on either side of her head and leaned forward.

She shivered as his breath touched her ear, his voice low when he spoke.

"I can see your mind racing, so let me help you with your decision." Ben's thumbs brushed across the inside of her wrist. "You can consummate our marriage like an obedient wife or you can resist. You strike me as an intelligent woman, despite your aggravating willfulness, so I'm sure you can see the merits of giving in. Should you need further convincing, however,

allow me to remind you that you have nowhere to go, nowhere to hide, and no one to rescue you. Should you choose to resist, I will have no choice but to punish you until you are willing to comply.”

He pulled away, his eyes piercing hers through the darkness. He let go of one of her wrists and cupped her cheek, lightly pressing his thumb to her bruise. Rey shook as her mind flooded with all the ways he could make her suffer.

“Now then,” he said. “Shall I continue?”

She stared at him, battling against the two bad choices she had, trying to find a third option. A voice in the back of her mind reminded her she’d never had sex before. Her teeth ground together as she realized she would lose her virginity to a mad man. She had never been a romantic. She hadn’t held on to her virginity for any moral reasons. The drive not to become another foster care statistic had so dominated her life in high school that she had never made time for a boyfriend. She simply had not had the time. Now her mind flooded with regret that she hadn’t prioritized it more, that because she had been driven to avoid the typical vices of foster kids, she was now going to lose her virginity against her will.

Ben cocked his head as he watched her. “Rey?” He drew her name out, the warning clear in his voice. “Shall I continue?”

Her eyes snapped back to his before glancing once more around the room, hoping that in the past several minutes a means of escape had presented itself. When none had, Rey closed her eyes, tears pricking at the corners as she came to the horrifying conclusion that she would have to allow it. She had no doubt that Ben could and would make her life a living hell if she refused. She did not even find it outside the realm of possibility that he would be willing to kill her if he did not get what he wanted.

She felt nauseated as she snapped her head in a sharp nod.

His thumb brushed once more across her cheek.

“Open your eyes.” His voice seemed strained as he spoke. Rey frowned as she obeyed, her eyes widening at the barely contained passion staring back at her.

“Say it.” His voice was barely above a whisper. “Shall I continue?”

Rey opened her mouth, her voice barely audible as she forced herself to say, “Yes.”

Before Rey could fully register what was happening, Ben’s hand slid back, his fingers tangling in her hair as he pressed his lips against hers. She once more registered the strange softness of his lips as they slid against hers. Her heart continued to drum in her chest as Ben pressed himself closer, his hand gripping her wrist against the wall, the pressure almost painful as he nipped at her lips.

Rey gasped at the low, desperate moan which came from Ben. His tongue delved into her mouth when her lips parted and Rey struggled between panic and some other emotion as his tongue scraped the top of her mouth, sending a swooping sensation low in her abdomen.

The hand not being held against the wall curled into a fist as she struggled against the desire to push Ben away. She reminded herself, even as she began to feel light headed, that resisting would only harm her chances of eventual escape.

A sound escaped her throat as Ben's mouth left hers and trailed kisses down her neck, sucking on the area where her shoulder and neck met. Ben brushed his thumb against her wrist, clearly delighted at her response. She ground her teeth together, determined not to make another sound.

The hand holding hers to the wall, let go, slowly trailing over her breast and down to her waist. He pulled away as his other hand found its way to her waist as well.

"Raise your arms."

Rey stared, nonplussed. "What?"

Ben gripped her waist and leaned forward, brushing his mouth against the shell of her ear, his nose nuzzling into her hair as he spoke.

"We need to get you out of the rest of these pesky clothes and the corset goes over your head."

He pulled back, watching her reaction. Rey struggled to keep herself from shivering, absolutely mortified that her body was responding to this man.

"Now then," he said once more, "lift your arms."

Rey thought briefly about refusing, but the faint amusement on Ben's face was enough to tell her he found her internal struggles amusing. Rey pressed her lips together, her jaw aching with how tightly she was clenching it as she raised her arms above her head.

Ben pushed the corset up, his hands brushing against her breasts. Throwing it aside, he reached behind her to untie her petticoat, which dropped in a pool at her feet.

Rey stood in her chemise, painfully aware that Ben had not removed a single item of his own clothing. She felt exposed, shivering in the chilled room, though from cold or fear or some other emotion she wasn't entirely sure.

Ben stepped back, grasping both of her hands to pull her forward, stepping out of her pool of skirts. Her heart fluttered in her chest, beating so quickly she was getting dizzy, the room taking on an almost dreamlike feel.

Ben leaned forward, pressing his lips to her shoulder and kissing a trail across to the center of her chest, pushing down the straps of her chemise as he kissed down her sternum. Rey barely held in a whimper as the chemise fell to the ground, leaving her fully nude. She balled her hands at her side, resisting the sudden urge to lean her head back and run her hands through Ben's hair.

*It's just biology. The body responds to stimuli. It doesn't mean anything.*

She repeated the words to herself as Ben crushed his mouth back onto hers and began walking her backwards towards the bed. When the back of her knees hit the mattress, Rey sat hard on the edge, breaking the kiss.

She willed herself to stare at Ben with loathing as his eyes widened, slowly drifting down her body.

His voice was deep when he spoke, sending a shiver through Rey's body.

“Lie back.”

When Rey didn’t do as she was told, Ben cocked his head, the corners of his mouth curving upwards as his eyes fell to her hands, still balled at her sides.

Rey narrowed her eyes at him, refusing to admit to feeling vulnerable being naked while he still had on his clothes. Drawing attention to it would only make him take his clothes off and Rey didn’t really want that either. A small voice in the back of her mind reminded her that the sooner he took off his own clothes the sooner this would all be over, but Rey ignored it. She was giving the man her pride and her virginity. She’d be damned if she gave him any more emotions aside from rage and loathing.

“Perhaps you would prefer a stronger hand?” His tone held faint amusement.

Rey pressed her lips together, refusing to dignify his question with a response as she laid back, her calves still dangling off the end of the bed. She stared at the canopy above, her nails digging into her palms as she squeezed them tightly.

She waited, body tensed, for Ben to continue. When he didn’t, she turned her eyes back to him, surprised to see he had shrugged out of his jacket and was unbuttoning his vest, pulling his shirt out of his pants. Rey swallowed, looking back up at the canopy above her as she pressed her knees firmly together.

She listened to the soft whisper of clothing hitting the floor and squeezed her eyes closed, chewing on her lower lip as the reality of what was happening hit her anew.

She was going to have sex. She was going to lose her virginity to a man she loathed. It was happening and she was effectively powerless to stop it.

Despite her every desire not to show Ben Solo how much she was affected, she felt a tear slid down her temple into her hair. She bit her lip harder to keep from sniffing.

She jumped when a hand touched her knee, holding her breath as it slid slowly up her thigh and over her hipbone. His touch softened as he trailed his knuckles up her abdomen, a finger tracing the curve of her breast before he continued trailing his hand up to her face, his thumb tracing her tear trail.

“Now then,” he said, surprisingly soft, “surely there is no cause for tears.”

Rey didn’t respond, her dignity in shreds at him seeing her cry. She wished he’d just do it. She didn’t want him to soft, to be kind, to think of her needs. She didn’t want foreplay. She just wanted it to be over with.

She blinked rapidly, trying to dispel the rest of her tears, staring resolutely at the canopy above.

“I’m being raped,” she ground out. “Did you expect me to be happy about it?”

His thumb stopped rubbing her cheekbone as the room became eerily quiet. Rey braced herself for a slap across the face.

Instead, the hand on her face tightened, forcing her chin down as he barked, “Look at me.”

Rey thought about refusing, but his fingers tightened to the point of pain. She was unsurprised to find a thunderous expression on his face.

“We are married,” he said, his tone containing barely restrained rage. “You are my wife.”

Rey flinched at the word, reminding herself she wasn’t really. It hadn’t been a real wedding.

“I am taking what is my due as a husband. I am not some monster, taking what belongs to another man.”

Before she even realized she was doing it, Rey barked a laugh.

Ben swooped down, crushing his lips to hers, pressing so hard that pain bloomed as her teeth pressed into her lips. She tried moving her head, but Ben held her chin firmly, keeping her where he wanted her.

His knee pressed between her knees. She struggled to keep them closed, but Ben was stronger than she was, forcing them apart and immediately settling himself in between. She felt something hard pressing against her center and whimpered.

Rey pushed against Ben, trying to shove him from on top of her, when he abruptly let go of her face, grabbing her wrists and pressing them into the mattress on either side of her head. Rey wrenched her head to the side, her breathing both shallow and rapid as Ben started trailing kisses down her jaw once more.

She tried twisting her wrists, but his grip was firm and unyielding. She tried twisting her body, but as she did so, Ben groaned loudly, her center rubbing against his with each twist.

Ben’s mouth suddenly closed over her breast and Rey gasped, the sensation causing another swoop in her low abdomen. She continued to try to free her hands, trying to ignore the sensations caused by Ben’s tongue swirling around her nipple, his teeth lightly biting.

*It’s just biology. The body’s natural response to stimuli.*

She repeated the words to herself as Ben continued his assault on her other breast, grinding her teeth together to stop herself from moaning. She pressed her nails into her palm in her effort to keep Ben from realizing he was having an effect on her.

The hollow feeling in her low abdomen, however, made it very hard for Rey not to squirm. Each time Ben’s teeth grazed her nipple, the hollowness intensified. The desire to shift her hips was becoming nearly overwhelming.

Ben abruptly surged up, crushing his lips to Rey’s once more. Gone was the gentleness. He bit her bottom lip, causing her to cry out. When she did so, he took the opportunity to invade her mouth, squeezing her wrists hard, as if daring her to bite him.

The change in angle also pressed his hard length into her, moaning as he rubbed against her. He rolled his hips into her, hitting a spot that ripped a gasp from her.

Rey whimpered, struggling harder to free her wrists, trying to twist the body that was betraying her, but was too firmly pinned down by Ben’s large body to do more than rub against him.

With each undulation of Ben's hips, the hollowness and desire to be filled grew stronger. Rey had tried over the years to give herself an orgasm, without success. That she was closer now than she had ever been in the past intensified her frustrations.

As if sensing how close she was, Ben slowed his hips, moving just fast enough to keep her frustrated. He pulled back, a smirk on his face as he watched her try to pretend she was unaffected.

She hated him. She hated the look in his eyes that told her he knew exactly how frustrated she was. Narrowing her eyes, she pressed her lips together and turned her face away.

Ben pulled her hands up above her head, holding both wrists securely with one hand. She could sense him watching her as his other hand drifted down, ghosting over her stomach on its way to her center.

She bit the inside of her lip hard to keep from moaning as his finger circled around her bundle of nerves. This was worse. Much worse. Ben's mouth curved upward, watching her closely as she struggled to keep from moaning, increasing the pressure and speed of his finger.

Rey swallowed, breathing shallowly as the intensity of sensation became nearly overwhelming. Her hips canted before she could stop them, searching for a way to relieve the emptiness. When she thought she was near her breaking point, Ben stopped rubbing. Rey exhaled sharply, her eyes snapping to his, narrowing her eyes at his triumphant expression. Turning her head away, she renewed trying to free her wrists. How was it possible he was strong enough to hold them both so securely in one hand?

After several moments, during which Rey tried to ignore the throbbing in her lower abdomen, Ben began rubbing again. Rey cried out before she could stop herself. She closed her eyes, trying to stop herself from responding, but doing so only heightened the sensations.

"Would you just fuck me already?"

Ben went still above her, Rey breathing rapidly as she realized what she had just said. The words had slipped out before she had even fully thought them.

The moment stretched as Rey watched triumph spread across Ben's face. She wanted to take it back. She'd rather be tortured with orgasm denial for the next fifty years than see that look on his face.

The moment broke when Ben reached down, lining himself up before slamming into her.

Rey cried out, a sharp pain lancing through her. Ben stilled, looking down at her in surprise.

"You've never lain with a man before?"

Rey didn't answer, heat flooding her cheeks as the pain receded, her body stretching to accommodate his size. Ben's expression softened.

Having him inside her, looking down at her, his face mere inches from hers, felt much too intimate. It grated.

She turned her head to the side.

“Just get it over with.” Her voice cracked, and she closed her eyes.

She expected some sort of response, a retort, a barb, but instead was met with silence. After a prolonged moment, Ben began moving. She opened her eyes and looked at the wall. She bit her lip once more as the urge to moan became nearly overwhelming.

Ben started slow, but increased his pace, his breathing rapid. When Rey involuntarily clenched, he moaned, speeding up even more, grabbing her leg and throwing it over his shoulder. The new angle caused each thrust to hit a spot inside her that had her crying out before she realized it.

The sensations became nearly overwhelming. She felt like a rubber band being slowly stretched to the point of breaking. Before it could break, however, Ben suddenly cried out, stilling above her before collapsing on top of her, breathing hard.

Rey lay gasping underneath him as Ben kissed her collarbone. When he finally let go of her wrists, Rey pushed his shoulders. She expected him to resist, but he rolled off of her. Rey shoved off the bed, grabbing the chemise off the floor as she hurried into the bathroom. Closing the door and leaning against it, Rey pressed a hand against her mouth as silent tears rolled down her cheeks.

## Chapter 8

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### Chapter 8

Rey's knees threatened to give way, shaking as her adrenaline crashed. She pushed away from the door, stumbling over to the toilet and sitting down. She clutched the chemise, pressing it against her mouth as she held her breath in an attempt to quell her sobs, rocking back and forth, tears streaking down her face.

It felt like hours, but eventually the tears dried up and Rey took deep breaths in an attempt to stop her shaking. She stood up, wincing at the unfamiliar pain between her legs. She held her breath once more when she threatened to come undone at the sight of blood and semen drying on her inner thighs.

Rey had never been more thankful for the period cramps that had propelled her to get an IUD.

Still hiccupping, Rey pulled a rag off the side of the bathtub, turning on the water in the sink with shaking hands. She meticulously wiped herself clean, wanting to rid all traces of what had been done to her. She swallowed thickly, resisting the urge to gag as she watched the pink tinged remnants swirl down the drain.

Once the water ran clear through the rag, Rey wrung it and threw it in a basket that could only be for dirty laundry. Turning back to the sink, Rey flinched at her appearance. The purple and yellow bruise covered nearly all of her cheek, her lips were swollen and red, her hair had come out of her braids, sticking out in all directions, and her complexion was wan, but it was the hollow look in her eyes that startled her the most.

She hardly recognized the girl staring back at her. She looked utterly defeated.

Rey turned away from the mirror, picking up the dropped chemise and sliding it back on. She supposed there was a nightgown in her drawers somewhere but she didn't feel like trying to find it, and if she squinted hard enough, it was almost like wearing a tank top and shorts. She pulled her hair out of the messy braids, running her fingers through the knots, before giving it up for a lost cause and pulling it into a low ponytail.

She turned towards the door, pausing with her hand in the knob.

Surely Ben had gone back to his own room.

She hesitated, her ears straining to hear anything that would let her know if Ben was still in the room.

Hearing nothing, she silently turned the knob, slowly pushed the door open, and stepped into the bedroom.

"I had started to worry something had happened to you."

Rey tensed at the deep voice. Turning towards the bed, she saw Ben sitting under the sheets, his back against the headboard looking relaxed. Her eyes darted to his clothing, still in



a pile on the floor.

Staring at the clothing, Rey spoke, her voice hoarse. "I thought you'd be gone."

Though she wasn't looking at him, Rey could hear the humor in his voice. "Why would I leave you on our wedding night? We are husband and wife now after all."

Rey flinched.

Thinking back to all the Victorian era movies she watched, she said, "D-Don't spouses keep separate bedrooms?"

"Rey."

At the warning in his voice, Rey's eyes snapped to him.

"Come to bed."

Rey swallowed, quickly contemplating her options, all of which ended with her getting in bed.

She slowly padded over to the side of the bed, pulling the covers back with shaking hands and sliding in, immediately turning on her side away from Ben and pulling her knees up to her chest. She curled her hands into fists, her nails biting into her skin, and held them against her chest, her eyes squeezed shut. She didn't breathe as she waited for Ben to speak.

The silence stretched on, and with every prolonged second that passed, Rey's hands squeezed tighter, forcing her to focus on the pain in her palms instead of the fact that Ben was sitting in bed next to her.

She felt the mattress shift and flinched when a hand landed on her hip, Ben's chest pressing against her back. His breath tickled her ear as his hand wandered first down before trailing up her stomach. Rey bit her lip painfully when Ben palmed her breast, running his thumb over her nipple through the thin material and gently squeezing. Rey's mouth opened silently as her body responded.

Ben pressed himself closer, so that Rey could feel him rubbing himself against her backside.

She jumped when she felt him nuzzling against her neck, placing kisses behind her ear and down her throat.

Rey closed her eyes as her body once more betrayed her, trying to gather her wits. She knew she needed to make him stop.

Now.

She needed to make him stop now.

Before she could stop herself, she moaned as Ben pinched her nipple and bit down lightly on the area where her shoulder met her neck.

Ben's deep chuckle snapped Rey out of the moment. She grabbed his hand, shoving it away from her body.

"Stop."

She felt him tense behind her and braced herself for his anger.

The moment stretched, Rey's nerves with it.

When nothing happened, she frowned. What game was Ben playing?

"Rey."

Rey turned her head, eyes wide at the softness in his voice.

Seeing Ben's open expression, she bit her lip, her breath hitching at this unfamiliar territory. He raised a hand to gently push her shoulder into the bed, encouraging her to turn fully to face him. Rey complied if only to satisfy her curiosity over Ben's shift in attitude.

*Can it really be he was just that hard up?* Rey scoffed internally at the thought.

Her muscles remained tense as she turned, keeping her back on the bed and turning her head, her face now inches away from Ben's. She swallowed as fear and another emotion uncurled in her stomach, her heart racing once more.

Ben's expression was open as he lifted a hand, trailing his fingers down her cheek before tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. Rey shivered, uncertain whether it was fear or something else that caused goosebumps to raise on her flesh.

*It's only fear.*

She repeated the thought to herself, ignoring all other explanations.

"You saved yourself for me." Ben's voice was barely a whisper as his gaze roved over her face and body before settling back on her eyes.

Rey swallowed, feeling herself flush and getting annoyed at her embarrassment. She had nothing to be embarrassed about.

"I didn't save myself for you." Rey pressed her lips together at how small and vulnerable she sounded. "I just never got around to having a boyfriend. If I had, I wouldn't have held on to my virginity. It's not like it's a big deal."

Rey clamped her mouth shut.

*Why are you telling him this? It's none of his business.*

A muscle ticked in Ben's jaw at her admission, his hand sliding from her face down to her neck. Rey's breath stuttered, though he didn't squeeze. She had the feeling that he meant it as a threat.

"Would you now?" Though his voice was low, the threat in his tone was unmistakable. "You would have given yourself to the first boy who offered like some cheap whore?"

Rey said nothing to that, clenching her jaw as his hand lightly squeezed around her neck, her heart racing.

"You cared nothing for your honor and virtue? Is this world from which you come so filled with debauchery?"

Rey huffed, forcing her fear down. She would not be cowed by this neanderthal. “As if your time period was any better. For all your talk of how horrible my time is, you’d think you could at least be real about the 1800s. That time period was hell on earth for everyone except men like you.”

Ben didn’t answer, surprising her as his hand drifted down once more. Rey held her breath, refusing to respond to his touch as he lightly kneaded her breast.

“If your virtue means so little to you, perhaps I should have taken less care with you.”

“Less care?” Rey scoffed again, throwing Ben’s hand off her again. “You fucking bruised my face, starved me, forced me to marry you, and then forced me to have sex with you. You call that caring? Because I call it abuse.”

Ben’s eyes darkened, and Rey cursed her mouth for running off without thinking.

“Perhaps if you weren’t so obstinate, I would not have had to take such drastic measures. This time you are from has given you lofty ideas and the only way to bring you to heel was to allow you to suffer.”

Rey didn’t know why she was surprised to hear Ben’s backwards ideas, but her anger flared hot at his words.

“I’m not a fucking dog.”

A corner of Ben’s mouth twitched. “No. My dogs were always much better behaved.”

He pinched her nipple hard. Rey cried as pain shot through her.

“You will learn to speak like a lady,” Ben’s soft voice belying his anger, “or I’ll be forced to treat you no better than the two dollar whore you sound like.”

When Rey said nothing, her breath coming out in short bursts, Ben pinched harder, curling his fingers so his nails bit into her flesh.

“Am I clear?”

“Yes!”

Rey gasped when Ben finally let go, her hand coming up to cup her breast, as if to protect it from further assault.

Ben pushed himself up until he hovered over her, his dark hair brushing against her face as his eyes held hers. Rey curled her hand into a fist, her muscles tensing at his proximity.

“In time you will see that I’m not the bad man you think I am.”

Rey gritted her teeth to stop herself from responding to his ludicrous statement.

Her breath stuttered once more when his eyes dropped to her lips. Leaning down slowly, Ben brushed his lips against hers. Rey remained tense, closing her eyes, lips unmoving.

Rather than continue his unwanted attention, Ben pulled back. Rey’s eyes flew open as Ben returned to laying on his side, curling an arm around her waist and forcing her to turn into his chest, her hands caught between them.

His hand rubbed gently up and down her back before stopping on her hip, his other hand curling around the back of her head and his chin resting on top.

“Now then, let’s sleep shall we?”

Rey said nothing, working on keeping herself from hyperventilating at being caged in, her cheek pressed against his bare chest.

*Breathe in.*

*One.*

*Two.*

*Three.*

*Four.*

*Five.*

*Breathe out.*

*One.*

*Two.*

*Three.*

*Four.*

*Five.*

As Rey continued to breathe, her breathing evened, the tension slowly drained from her body as each tightly wound muscle relaxed.

She wasn’t sure how much time had passed — it felt like hours — but finally she felt Ben’s arms relax, his breath deepening as he fell asleep.

Rey forced herself to count to one hundred before she slowly began to extricate herself. Her breathing exercise was completely undone as, with every small movement, Rey tensed, waiting for Ben to wake.

Eventually she was able to lift her hand to carefully move Ben’s hand from her hip, placing it on his own. His breath hitched and his brows pulled together. Rey froze, not daring to so much as blink as she waited for him to open his eyes.

When his breathing deepened once more, Rey carefully ducked her head out from under his chin, turning away. When she was on her other side, she closed her eyes, exhaling deeply.

She felt as if the day had been never ending. Could she really have been stuck there for only two days?

She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to force herself not to think of all that had transpired. She pressed her lips together and held her breath as tears began trailing her face, dripping off the end of her nose. She pulled her knees up and wrapped her arms around them. When her chest felt as if it were going to burst, she opened her mouth, trying to exhale quietly before taking a slow breath in and holding it once more.

Her heart continued beating furiously, as she felt the heat rolling off Ben underneath the covers, a constant reminder of who was sharing her bed. Her body felt battered. Her cheek was throbbing from crying, her muscles aching from lack of food and exercise, and she still felt an unfamiliar tenderness between her legs.

Every time she was nearly asleep, Ben would exhale, or move, or mumble in his sleep and Rey would immediately wake once more. She watched the moon move across the sky through the window, exhaustion pulling at her. Finally, when she could no longer keep her eyes open, Rey drifted to sleep.

## Chapter 9

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### Chapter 9

*Rey screamed as she watched her husband's throat get slit by a man who called himself Kylo Ren. "Shh-shh. Quiet, little bird. This won't hurt." The moment shifted and Rey found herself barefoot, running through the woods, terrified that Kylo would find her. The scene shifted again, Rey leaning against Kylo's chest as he confessed his past to her and she realized he was human after all. He asked her to call him Ben. Another shift and Rey pulled Kylo into a kiss, a bloody knife clattering to the floor. "I love you," Kylo mumbled...*

Rey's eyes flew open, her heart beating rapidly, her breath coming in sharp bursts. It took her a few moments to realize she had been dreaming. Everything had felt so real, every detail so starkly vivid. She swallowed, trying to breathe deeply, to calm her nerves. Where had her brain even come up with it? Who fell for a serial rapist? For the man who murdered your husband? It was so insanely messed up. Her eyes darted around the room as she tried to stop the images from replaying in her mind. It had to be the stress she was under.

Rey tensed when she felt a nose brushing behind her ear, only then noticing the arm banded around her waist, her head resting against a bicep, the warmth of a body flush against her.

"I trust you slept well?"

The deep voice tickled her ear, making Rey squirm, her breathing becoming shallow once more.

"No." She winced at how small her voice sounded.

"No?" Ben kissed behind her ear before slowly pressing kisses down the line of her jaw towards her lips.

"I dreamed you murdered my husband. That you were a rapist."

Ben froze. Rey closed her eyes and waited for his anger, knowing it was stupid to goad him but wanting to do anything to stop him from kissing her.

The silence seemed to stretch forever, her nerves fraying as each second ticked by. Her mind ran rampant, images of what Ben had already done blending with those of her dream to create new and horrifying ways in which he could torture her.

Her eyes flew open and her brows drew together when he sighed, removing his arm from her waist and pulling away. Before she could stop herself, she rolled onto her back, turning her head to look at Ben, who had moved to sit at the edge of the bed. She whipped her head back to the window when he stood up and she realized he was stark naked. Heat flooded her face. She forced herself to watch the clouds drifting across the sky, trying to distract herself from thinking about how his back muscles moved.

She heard the rustle of clothing before Ben walked around the bed, holding his hand out to her. Rey frowned at the proffered hand. She raised her eyes, meaning to look at his face. Instead, her gaze snagged on the bare torso before her. She had known the man was huge, but hadn't realized the muscles those clothes of his were hiding.

She jerked her eyes up to his face when she realized she was staring. She'd be damned if she would allow herself to be attracted to the man. She reminded herself what he had done to her as a corner of his mouth turned up. She ground her teeth together at the smug look in his eyes. What was wrong with her?

"It's time for you to dress." He shook his hand at her, waiting for her to grasp it.

Rey scoffed, pushing herself up and ignoring his proffered hand. She walked around him, giving him a wide berth, and yanked open her wardrobe. She grabbed a dress at random, pulling it over her head, her face flaming in humiliation and anger as she turned her back to him.

She heard his steps near and tensed when he came to stand right behind her, his finger dragging up her arm as he leaned down, his lips next to her ear.

"You can't wear a dress without your corset."

Rey shivered as his breath brushed across her cheek. She gritted her teeth, telling herself they were shivers of fear. She pressed her lips together as he pushed the dress down her arms, pooling it at her feet. Before he could move, Rey kicked the dress aside, stalking to the wardrobe, yanking open the bottom drawer and pulling out a corset.

She began pulling it over her head when Ben spoke up once more.

"You're forgetting the bustle." She heard him sigh, though it sounded more amused than irritated.

Exhaling sharply, Rey rolled her eyes and pulled open the drawers which held the bustle. She pulled it on, tying it quickly before Ben could do it for her, and then pulled the corset over her head. Ben watched her, the corner of his mouth upturned. She ground her teeth together at his amusement.

"Just pull the laces."

Ben clicked his tongue. "That's not the very proper way of asking for help."

Rey tensed once more as he stalked to her. He stopped behind her, his arm snaking around her waist underneath the corset, tickling her ribs as his hand drifted upwards. Rey snapped her hand out to grab his wrist, stopping his upward ascent.

"Would you please tie the laces of my corset for me?"

She hated every word. They felt like ash on her mouth. However, when the alternative was to be groped, she could set her pride aside.

*Pick your battles, Rey.*

Ben pulled his hand back, kissing her shoulder. "There now. Was that so difficult?"

Yes.

Rey pressed her lips together as Ben pulled the laces tight. She inhaled, hoping for more room, but a quick jerk on the laces and the breath whooshed out of her, the stays cutting tightly into her ribs.

"I can't breathe."

"You'll learn to." Ben's tone was matter-of-fact, clearly unconcerned with whether or not she fainted from lack of oxygen.

"If you expect me to do anything, you're going to have to loosen this corset. I'm going to pass out before I get halfway down the hall."

She heard a sigh and inhaled as the laces were loosened.

"Very well," he said, "though I don't know why I indulge you."

Rey resisted the urge to snort derisively, silently rolling her eyes instead.

Once the laces were tied, Ben picked up her dress.

"Arms up." He sounded as if he were talking to a child.

Rey lifted her arms, clenching her jaw so hard she was surprised she didn't crack a tooth.

The dress was slipped over her head, her arms threading through the sleeves. Ben started buttoning from the bottom. She tensed when she felt his lips against her lower back, kissing up her spine with each button. Her heart started beating rapidly as she balled her hands at her sides.

"Stop."

Ben paused, his lips on her lower back. A flare of white-hot rage tore through her when she felt him smile against her skin.

"Is a husband not allowed to show his wife affection?"

Rey abruptly turned, glaring down at him. "I don't want your affection."

She ignored the strange swoop in her stomach as she realized how pretty his eyes were, framed by long black eyelashes. It only made her angrier that she noticed.

The corner of Ben's mouth turned up again, and Rey saw red.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?"

His smirk dropped as he narrowed his eyes. "Language."

"Give me a break." She narrowed her eyes back at him. 'Stop telling me I can't speak however the fuck I want. Stop pretending you give a shit about me.' Her voice rose with each word. "Stop trying to make me want you. It is *never* going to happen. The only thing you'll ever be to me is my rapist."

Her chest was heaving by the time she finished her tirade.

A tendril of fear unfurled in her stomach at the fury she saw behind his eyes and she braced herself for another smack across the face as he rose, his eyes locked on hers.



She flinched when he cupped her cheek, but she refused to close her eyes.

“Your rapist, am I?” Though he spoke softly, there was a dangerous quality to his voice.

He leaned forward, his eyes level with hers, his lips a hairsbreadth away from her own.

“As I recall, you gave me full permission.” His lips brushed hers. She took a step back, but he stepped forward, grabbing her hand to stop her retreat. He brushed his thumb along the inside of her wrist. ‘You responded to my touch, did you not?’ He kissed her jaw, his fingers trailing from her cheek down to the tops of her breasts. “You moaned for me.” He kissed his way down her neck, sucking on the skin at the juncture of her shoulder and neck. Rey bit her lip as her lower abdomen tightened.

*What is wrong with you?*

She shook her head, trying to clear it. “All I recall is you blowing your load early.” He tensed and Rey smiled, not even caring what punishment she had just earned. It would be worth it to bring down his delusions of grandeur.

His breath whispered across her neck and she struggled not to shiver at the feeling.

Slowly he raised his head and Rey’s eyebrows drew together at the color on his cheeks. He let go of her, smoothing down his hair as he looked away.

They stood in silence for several moments, Rey staring at him, trying to figure out why he wasn’t hurting her, and Ben looking resolutely out the window. After a time, he turned back to her, grasping her by the shoulders and turning her around. Rey was so shocked she didn’t even try to stop him. He quickly and efficiently buttoned up the remainder of her dress, stepping away when he was done.

Rey turned slowly to watch him scoop up his clothes as he walked towards the door.

Without looking back, he said, “I’ll expect breakfast when I come downstairs, so I suggested you hurry to it.”

Rey stared at the empty door.

*What the fuck is going on?*

---

Rey stared at the boiling water. She knew there were other things besides oatmeal for breakfast, but she really didn’t know how to cook. She’d probably burn eggs and bacon if she even attempted to make that. She really didn’t even know how to make oatmeal. She’d only ever microwaved it.

She walked in a daze over to the cupboard to pull down the tin of oatmeal. She lifted the lid off, staring down at the can, three quarters of the way full. Her brows drew together as she wondered where Ben’s food came from. Clearly he didn’t have access to a grocery store, so where did it come from?

The sound of boiling water brought her back to the present. She took the tin over, staring down at the boiling water when she realized she had absolutely no idea how much to put in

there. Deciding she'd just have to wing it, she tipped the tin and poured. When she figured it was enough, she set the tin back down, grabbing a wooden spoon to stir the pot with.

She let her mind wander as she stirred. She couldn't figure Ben out. Why was he so quick to hit her before but so patient today? It couldn't just be the sex. She smirked to herself at his being embarrassed about how quickly the whole thing was over. She certainly didn't want it to have gone on longer, but it was satisfying that he was clearly ashamed. Then again, the fact that he didn't lash out at her over his humiliation was another thing on the list of things that made no sense.

She was snapped out of her thoughts when her arm stopped moving. She looked down at the oatmeal, which seemed to have turned to cement. Rey cursed under her breath as she quickly turned off the stove, the smell of burning grain drifting upwards.

*Maybe more water?*

She ran to the sink, filling a cup with water and taking it over. She tossed it in there, trying to stir the congealed mess again. The spoon snapped to the side, splashing oatmeal water up onto her cheek.

"I hope breakfast will be done soon."

Rey jumped, turning quickly, placing her body in front of the pot.

She swallowed thickly as she took in Ben's appearance. All trace of embarrassment was gone. There was not a hair out of place and his suit had clearly been tailored to fit him. His broad shoulders narrowed to a slim waist and Rey couldn't help but remember the muscles those clothes were hiding.

"Are you finished?"

Rey's gaze snapped back up to Ben's, who was smirking at her knowingly.

Rey pressed her lips together, the knowledge that she found him attractive leaving her incensed.

*Get a grip. The man raped you. Who cares what he looks like? He's a pig.*

Rey turned back around, staring at the slightly less congealed oatmeal, stirring it without word. She breathed a sigh of relief as the water seemed to have remoistened the oatmeal. She heard Ben walk up behind her.

"That looks absolutely awful."

Rey threw down the spoon, whirling around before trying to step back, surprised at Ben's close proximity. He looked over her shoulder as she pressed her back against the stove, trying to move away from him.

"I have never seen oatmeal look less appealing. What on earth did you do?"

Rey's cheeks heated as she lifted her chin. "I told you I don't know how to cook. If you're going to be backwards about everything and insist that I cook, then you'd better get used to shit meals."

Ben looked upwards, sighing heavily. "I suppose I shall have to teach you, though it would be nice if you let me know just what skills you have exactly. Do you know how to do anything useful?"

Rey scoffed. "Just because I don't know how to cook doesn't mean I'm not useful. Women don't just sit at home all day anymore."

Ben's eyebrows lifted. "And what exactly do they do in this debauched world you live in. Not wear clothes, so far as I've seen."

Rey glared. "All those women you've seen? They all go to university."

Ben barked a laugh of disbelief. "What on earth would a woman need with college?"

Rey crossed her arms. "Well I was going to be studying to become an engineer. I'm planning to get my bachelors degree in mechanical engineering, but I also have a fascination with fluid mechanics and optical engineering, so I may go to grad school, though whether I opt for two masters degrees or a masters and doctorate, I hadn't decided. But I'm only nineteen after all. I have plenty of time to decide. If I decide to get a doctorate I could always become a professor myself, though I'm not sure that teaching is all that appealing for me, so I may decide to go work for one of the demon oil corporations, if I get that masters in fluid mechanics, and see what I can do to help save the environment. But you know, I just haven't quite decided."

Ben mirrored her stance, his arms crossed as he stared down at her while she spoke. Rey's chest heaved as if she had just finished a race. They stared at one another for several minutes, neither moving. Ben's eyes looked between hers, and her heart stuttered.

What was happening to her? Why was her body responding to this god awful, misogynistic psychopath? The man was certifiable. Being alone for over a century had clearly only heightened whatever mental issues he had to begin with. The man had forced himself on her and yet all he has to do is touch her or stare at her and she melted? Maybe she was the certifiable one.

Rey shoved him away from her. He stumbled back, shock written on his face. She brushed past him with no clear idea of where she was headed. She just needed to get away from him.

"What about breakfast?" He sounded disbelieving.

"Make it yourself!" She tossed the words over her shoulder as she headed for the front door. Obviously, she needed some air to clear her head.

## Chapter 10

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### Chapter 10

Rey shoved the door open, rushing down the steps at it banged against the side of the house. At the bottom of the steps she turned left. She knew there was no way forward and she needed to clear her head.

Picking up her skirts, she ran around the side of the mansion, happy to see a long stretch of lawn before her. Her lungs burned, unable to draw a large enough breath through her corset, but she pushed herself harder, leaning forward to give her legs better leverage as she barreled towards the edge of a cliff.

She slowed to a walk as she neared the edge, chest heaving. She felt better already. The air was pleasantly cool, the sun was shining off the vast stretch of ocean before her. It was as if she'd breathed out the stagnant air of that horrible house.

She reached the very edge of the cliff and paused. Stretching out her hand, she confirmed her suspicions when she met the resistance of whatever barrier surrounded them, right at the cliff's edge. She looked down below, seeing a small stretch of beach, the waves lapping up on it.

So not only was she stuck in whatever weird dimension she was in, she was right next to a beach and couldn't even use it.

*Just my luck. Endless time, a beach, and never the twain shall meet.*

She dropped onto the grass, her chest still heaving as she tried to get enough oxygen from her shallow breaths. She squinted against the brightness of the morning sun reflected off the water.

What was happening to her? What kind of a person actually got off being touched by their rapist? She didn't care what delusions Ben told himself. He had made her say the words, but she hadn't meant them. Given any alternative she would have told him to fuck off. So why had her body betrayed her?

She looked around, seeing a couple walking their dog half a mile away. For that matter, where the hell was she and how had she gotten here? She knew the mirror was involved, but what was it? Some kind of portal? All magic was merely something science had yet to explain, she knew, but everything she'd encountered so far seemed closer to science fiction than reality.

She reached out her hand again, fingers brushing the invisible barrier. She squinted, looking closely where her fingers met resistance, trying to discern any shimmering or other signs of the barrier keeping her there. She flattened her hand against it. Did it feel flat or did it have a curve to it? She glanced up, wondering how far up the barrier went. If she had a hot air balloon, could she escape? Or would she bounce off a barrier above them. She looked at the

grass, seeing how green it looked. When it rained, did it rain here? So far it would seem that all the weather here was the same as outside this dimension.

She drew her hand away, sighing. If only she had some of her books with her. Or access to google. She wasn't fussy about which, so long as she could see a book published after 1880.

She pulled her knees up, wrapping her arms around them and resting her chin on top. She could hear the sound of the waves below and closed her eyes, trying to imagine she wasn't stuck in a magic portal, hadn't been raped, her body wasn't responding to said rapist. She was just sitting there, not in a corset and dress, listening to the calm soothing sounds of the ocean.

She wasn't sure how long she sat there before she heard faint crunch of steps headed her way.

She tensed as Ben's footsteps halted just behind her.

"Come, I made breakfast."

Rey shook her head, her fingers flexing into her knees, whatever tension she'd been able to dispel immediately returning.

"I'm not hungry."

She heard a snort behind her. "I find that difficult to believe."

Rey rolled her eyes, but didn't otherwise respond, hoping he'd leave her alone.

Instead he stepped next to her and sat down.

Rey huffed, turning towards him before stopping as a sound hit her ears. Gasping she whipped her head back towards the road to confirm that she had heard the sound of closing car doors. Her breath caught when she saw two police officers walking up to the gate.

She jumped up, gathering her skirts, and took off running again, ignoring Ben's shout behind her.

Someone was here. There had to be a way to get them to notice her. There had to be.

She barely noticed the stitch in her side as she ran towards the two officers. They hadn't moved beyond the gate, standing just inside it, and seemed to be having an argument. Her blood rushed in her ears, the sound of her breathing all she could make out. It felt as if time had stopped as she ran towards them. She thought her friends had forgotten about her. She hadn't seen anyone since the night she was stuck here.

She began shouting as she drew near to them.

"Hey! Please! I'm right here!"

She stopped just short of them, catching her breath as she heard what they were arguing about.

"I'm telling you," the older of the two said, "if you go in there you'll be just as likely to die when the whole thing collapses as find anything."

"We can't just leave without checking it out," the other argued.

“Mark my words. This girl will pop up in a week and say the whole thing was a prank.”

Rey shook her head, stepping forward and trying to grab the man’s arm. Her fingers slipped through like she was trying to grasp fog.

“No.” Her voice shook. “I’m here. Please, keep looking. I’m here.”

The mirror.

She gasped, raising her voice. “Go inside. Just go inside! Look at the mirror!”

“Well, I’m not leaving without at least going inside.”

The elder cop snorted. “Your funeral. I’ll wait here.”

The younger man rolled his eyes and walked towards the house, warily assessing it. Rey knew what he’d be seeing. A dilapidated old home, looking ready to collapse. She rushed ahead of him, seeing Ben round the corner of the house, and ran inside, up to the mirror.

The man cautiously peeked through the door. Rey waved her arms and pointed at the mirror.

“The mirror. LOOK AT THE MIRROR!”

She gasped when Ben stepped through the man.

“He can’t hear you, you know.”

Rey ignored him. Pointing at the mirror again. “Come this way! Look into the mirror!”

“He won’t see you.”

Rey glared as the man pulled out a flashlight and flicked it on, sweeping it around the entrance.

“Shut up.”

Ben stopped and leaned one shoulder against the wall next to the mirror, crossing his arms and feet.

“Do you think I haven’t tried this before?”

Rey ignored him again, her breath catching as the officer spotted the mirror and walked up to it.

“Yes. YES.”

Rey stood in front of the mirror, pressing her fingers onto its surface, and glancing back to make sure the officer was still coming towards it.

Her voice quieted to a whisper. “Please. Just look at the mirror. I’m right here.”

The officer looked into the mirror and frowned. Her heart stopped as he leaned forward.

“Yes. I’m right here.”

He looked her in the eyes, his frown deepening.

She placed her entire palm on the glass, looking back at him. Could he see her? Surely he wouldn't be looking her in the eyes if he didn't.

Suddenly he turned and looked over his shoulder, pulling away from mirror.

*No. No no no no.*

"Nonononono."

Rey tried to grab the man's shoulder but her hand slipped through as it had before.

"NO!" Rey raced around in front of the man, but he walked through her into the sitting room, swinging his flashlight around. No doubt on his side the house was dark and dusty.

"You are performing an exercise in futility."

Ben walked calmly into the room.

Rey glared at him again. "Shut. Up."

Ben narrowed his eyes at her, raising his voice. "Do you think you are doing something I haven't thought of before? That I was too stupid to try to speak to people when they came to the house? That I didn't scream at the authorities when they came to investigate my disappearance? That I didn't rage at my mother as she packed up and left?"

He stopped talking then, but Rey heard the catch in his voice. She stared a moment, her brows drawn together, but returned her attention to the officer leaving their sitting room.

Rey rushed out of the room, heedless of Ben's words.

"Stop. Please. I'm right here."

She continued her litany of frantic entreaties for the man to see her all the way out the front door and down the stairs.

"What'd I tell you?" The older officer chuckled as the younger shook his head, chagrined.

"Let's just get out of here. This place gives me the creeps. I could have sworn I heard whispering, but there was nothing there."

Rey's heart leapt into her throat. He had heard her!

She renewed her pleading. "Go back to the house! Look closer!"

She gasped when they crossed the threshold of the barrier and she couldn't follow them any further.

"PLEASE!" She screamed the word, tears now streaking down her face. She banged her palms against the barrier. "COME BACK! LOOK AGAIN!"

Her cries went unheard by the men and Rey was forced once more to watch a car leave her behind.

Rey spent the rest of the day in a daze. Ben had given her a long suffering sigh, collecting her off the ground and forcing her to return to the house to eat breakfast. He spent the morning reading to her, though she didn't hear a word. What ever sliver of hope she had had left of someone discovering her whereabouts had been snuffed out.

She didn't want to believe Ben, but she knew he was telling her the truth. He had been there for much longer than she had.

After lunch, which Ben both cooked and cleaned up after, he returned them both to the library to continue reading. He had Rey tucked into his side, his arm around her shoulders.

She honestly didn't care enough to fight him. It was harmless. All he was doing was reading. And she didn't have the energy to deal with him on top of the crashing realization that she might be stuck in this place with him forever.

She frowned as she thought about how he had acted the entire day. Compared to the previous days, he had been nothing but a perfect gentleman. He had let her mouth off to him without repercussions. Only the previous night he had nearly pinched her nipple off for swearing. Today she had cussed him out and received nothing but a stern look. And he appeared to be letting her process and grieve, not forcing her to do any work, reading to her all afternoon.

But why?

Why had he changed? For that matter, *had* he changed? It would seem so, but a single day didn't seem like enough data to form a conclusion. Perhaps he had found he didn't enjoy a wife with a bruised face, that he agreed with her "progressive" ideas about rape.

Rey barely restrained a snort at that thought. No. Something else was going on. She just didn't know what.

By the time night came, Rey was completely exhausted. She had nearly fallen asleep against Ben's shoulder again, the evening's reading from the bible, a passage about husbands and wives that had had Rey rolling her eyes. She trudged slowly up the stairs, Ben's hand on her lower back.

Rey went into her room, pulling out her braids as she did so. She didn't even realize Ben had followed her in until she heard the snick of the closing door.

She turned towards him, eyes widening at the look in his eye as he turned towards her.

He stalked near, removing his cufflinks, setting them on top of the chest of draws as Rey backed herself into a wall, shaking her head.

Her heart started hammering and she could hear her heartbeat in her ears. Ben paused, his head tilted as he began pulling off his belt and coiling it neatly beside his cufflinks.

Rey closed her eyes. This couldn't be happening again. Maybe he was just planning to sleep next to her.

Her eyes flew open at the sound of his trousers hitting the floor. Stepping out of them, never taking his eyes off Rey, he folded them on top of the dresser before moving his hands to unbutton and shrug off his waistcoat.



Rey watched him, eyes wide with horror, as he slowly unbuttoned his shirt. When he pulled it off, Rey felt herself flush at the bulge in his underpants and looked away.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw him stalk towards her, but still flinched when he touched her shoulder.

“It’s time to get you out of those clothes.”

Rey’s heart hammered as she turned, nails biting in to her palms as she curled them into fists. She felt him deftly unbutton her dress.

Pushing the dress down her arms, Ben brushed the top of her breasts with the back of his hands. Rey shivered and then tensed, trying to stop herself from reacting to him. He pulled her hands out of the sleeves and threw the dress towards the wardrobe. Pressing a kiss to her shoulder, he began undoing the laces of her corset. She bit her lip, tears pooling in her eyes as the reality that she was going to be forced to have sex with him again crashed into her. She looked up, trying to blink away the wetness as Ben raised her arms to pull the corset over her head, throwing it over near her dress.

He quickly untied the bustle and pulled it down, having her step out of it. Left in her chemise, Rey turned, wrapping her hands around her middle.

“I-I can sleep in this.”

She swallowed as he stepped closer, his eyes dark as night.

“Sleep in your chemise? Perhaps.” His voice was barely above a whisper as he dragged the back of his hand down the side of her face. “But I’m afraid you cannot bathe in it.”

Rey’s brain halted. She blinked rapidly as she processed what he was saying.

“Bathe?”

Ben nodded. “Yes. You’ve had such a trying day. You could use a good soak in the tub to wash off the misery.”

Rey swallowed, her breathing shallow. “W-will I be alone?”

The corners of his mouth turned up. “And how would I massage out the stress if you were alone?”

Rey shook her head. “I don’t need you to massage out the stress. Just let me take a bath by myself.”

Ben clicked his tongue and the man she had thought so different in the light of day returned.

“What a waste of water. It would be better put to use cleaning two people instead of one, don’t you think?”

Ben put his fingers through the straps of her chemise and pulled them down, exposing her chest. When he met the resistance of her hands around her middle, he gave her a condescending look.

“Remove your arms, my dear.”

Rey started shaking as she shook her head no, her fingers flexing into the material in the vain hope she would be able to stop him.

He grabbed both her wrists and wrenched her hands away from her body, yanking the chemise down, completely exposing her.

A sob escaped Rey's lips before she could stop it as the chemise hit the floor.

Ben clicked his tongue at her once more. "Now then. There's no need for theatrics. It's only a bath."

Rey knew he was lying. It would be more than a bath. She'd have to take the bath with him. Naked. The gaslights would be on. It would be a nightmare.

Rey dully allowed him to pull her towards the bathroom, her other hand covering her breasts.

Keeping hold of her hand, Ben turned on the faucet, testing the temperature before letting the tub fill.

Rey stared at the tub, frowning as she considered the modern-looking plumbing.

"How is there running water?"

Ben turned to her, eyebrows raised. "Does running water not exist in your time?"

Rey shook her head. "No. I mean... yes it does, but I didn't think Victorians had running water."

"Victorians?"

Rey nodded, still looking resolutely at the tub, slowly filling. "That's what people from the late 1800s are called. For Queen Victoria."

Ben was silent for long enough that Rey glanced over at him. He frowned at her, confusion on his face.

"Why should you wonder why I had running water? Every major house of the era has running water. It's only the poor who haven't been able to afford it."

Rey turned back to the tub. "Huh."

They remained silent as the tub filled. When it was over halfway full, Ben turned off the water. He stepped in first, hissing slightly at the temperature as he pulled her to step in as well. He gripped her hand tightly, no doubt to stop her from running away.

Rey stepped into the tub, not really registering the temperature. Ben turned her so that her back was to him, and then pulled her down so that she was sitting between his legs.

He leaned against the back of the tub, pulling her against his back, his arm curled around her stomach.

Rey closed her eyes when she felt him prodding against her back, her face heating.

His other hand pushed aside her hair so that he could press a kiss against her neck. He bit down lightly and Rey tensed as she felt a jolt in her lower abdomen.

*Please no.*

Ben kissed the area he had bit, his tongue darting out to sooth the wound as his hand trailed down her arm and across to her breast. Rey thought about jumping out and running away as his wet fingers glided across her nipple, hardened from the cool air. He trailed his hand down to cup the underside of her breast, squeezing gently.

Rey bit her lip to stop herself from making a sound as he sucked hard on her neck.

She felt him chuckle and then realized she was digging her nails into his legs on either side of her. She snatched them away, pushing his hand off her breast and sitting forward.

“Stop.”

“Mmm.” His low voice traveled over her like a caress and Rey gritted her teeth to stop herself from shivering. “I did say I was going to massage the tension out of you, didn’t I?”

Rey pressed her lips together when she felt his hands on her shoulders, his thumbs gently digging into her shoulders.

*Damn. That feels really good.*

Rey groaned, her head falling forward as Ben’s thumbs worked their way down her spine and back up.

“There now. See? All you needed to do was relax.”

Rey’s head popped up as she realized she had been enjoying his hands on her.

Ben clicked his tongue at her. “And now you’ve gone and undone all my handiwork. I guess I’ll have to try something more... persuasive.”

A chill ran down Rey’s spine at his tone. Eyes wide, she looked behind her. One corner of Ben’s mouth was tilted up in a smirk, his pupils blown wide.

“Please don’t.” Her voice was barely audible as she pleaded for him to leave her alone.

Ben tilted his head. “But you have no idea what I have planned. You’ve been so tense lately, under so much stress, I really should do something to help you. What sort of husband would I be if I didn’t try to lesson your stress?”

“The kind who listens when his wife says no.” She bit out the words behind clenched teeth.

“I realize that this is all very new to you, but I have much more experience in this area than you. Trust me when I tell you that you’ll enjoy my ministrations very much.”

Rey turned back around. “Is that what the whores told you? You know they’re paid to make you think whatever you want right?”

Rey had hoped she could anger him enough to stop him from touching her, but she was wrong.

She jumped when she felt Ben’s lips on her middle back, kissing upwards as if finishing what he started that morning. One hand touched her shoulder, his hand sliding around to her

neck and forcing her back against him. His fingertips grazed her chin as he tilted her head to the side to afford him better access to her neck.

His lips, however, were the least of her problems. His other hand, after making a slight detour to lightly pinch both her nipples, began traveling south.

A sob burst out of her lips, her stomach muscles clenching as his hand trailed down.

“Shhh.” His mouth traveled up to her ear as he whispered, “You’ll enjoy this. I promise.”

She jumped when his finger reached the bundle of nerves between her thighs, a zing running through her body. He lazily swirled his finger around, causing her breath to catch as he kissed down her jaw, turning her head towards him so he could kiss her lips.

Rey tried to remain impassive. Responding in fear only seemed to egg him on. Maybe if she pretended to be completely unaffected, he would get angry and stop.

His tongue trailed the seam of her lips, her lips opening on a gasp when his other hand suddenly pressed down. He took the opportunity to delve inside her mouth.

*Dead fish. You’re a dead fish.*

She kept her eyes squeezed shut as the tension in her body ratcheted up with every swipe of Ben’s thumb.

She had never orgasmed before. She had tried. Many, many times. She had watched porn, had read articles on how to finger yourself, her bottom dresser drawer hid various and sundry vibrators, but she’d never managed it. Porn was just ridiculous most of the time, the women very obviously fake moaning for the benefit of the male viewers. She tried searching out porn gifs, but those were too quiet. Vibrators certainly got her the furthest, but she couldn’t ever get to the end. She could feel herself get close but no matter what she did she couldn’t get across the finish line. It had been so frustrating she had stopped even trying several months ago. She’d rather continue wondering what it felt like than to put herself through that frustration again.

She refused to orgasm now.

Ben started rubbing faster and Rey gasped into his mouth before she could stop herself. The hand currently holding her face to him drifted down to her chest, brushing lightly against her nipples.

The sensations were too much. Rey started breathing quickly as she tried to avoid responding. It was difficult not to squirm at the pulsing emptiness in her lower abdomen. She whimpered when Ben began moving his hand quicker, his lips sliding against hers, his tongue sliding in and out of her mouth. The hand at her breast alternated between squeezing her breast and pinching her nipples, moving between both breasts.

Rey felt herself nearing orgasm and began to panic. She could not orgasm. It was obscene. How was her body even responding? It had never strummed so easily for her, but for a man she loathed her body responded quickly and enthusiastically.

Rey wrenched her head away, gasping for air. Ben however, was not deterred, kissing up her jaw behind her ear, and back down her throat to the juncture of her shoulder and neck. His

tongue laved at the spot, tickling her before he bit down gently at the same time he pinched her nipple and pressed down his thumb.

Before Rey could stop it, she keened.

She felt Ben smile against her skin as he repeated the motion, his thumb rubbing so quickly on her that she wondered how he didn't get a cramp, his fingers strumming her nipples like they were guitar strings, and sucking hard on her neck.

It became hard to think about anything other than the sensations she was feeling. This was so different than a porn video and her vibrator. The sensations were overwhelming. Without realizing it, she canted her hips, seeking something, anything, to push her over the edge.

"Please." She moaned the word, not fully aware she was even speaking it.

Ben chuckled, but before Rey could realize that she was actually asking him for more, he pressed harder, circled faster. Rey threw her head back as her body finally broke, moaning loudly as wave after wave of delicious sensation flooded through her.

After what felt like forever — perhaps minutes, or even hours — Rey slumped back, her body entirely relaxed.

Ben withdrew his hands, rubbing them up and down her arms and kissing her shoulder as her head lolled against him.

"There now. Didn't I promise to relax you?"

Horror replaced contentment as Rey realized what had happened. Ben had given her her first orgasm.

## Chapter 11

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### Chapter 11

The blood rushed in Rey's ears. She quickly leaned forward, her arms curling around her stomach as her chest rose and fell rapidly.

It was too much.

It was horrifying.

She had said please.

A sob escaped her lips as her head fell onto her knees, shaking back and forth as if she could simply say no and change the truth.

She didn't even react when a hand landed on her back, rubbing in circles.

Her body was still humming on its post-orgasmic high, her skin still overly sensitive, shivers running through her as Ben trailed his fingers up to her shoulders.

Another sob left her lips.

"Now then, lets get you washed, shall we?"

Rey whipped her head around. "I can wash myself."

Ben shushed her as he slowly drew a bar of soap back and forth across a rag. "Nonsense. I have been waiting for this day for a long time."

Rey frowned, too confused to remember she should be resisting. "What?"

Instead of answering, Ben raised an eyebrow, setting the soap aside and rubbing her back with the rag.

She turned back around, the rag feeling rough on her skin as he meticulously rubbed it across her back and up to her neck. He pushed her hair to one side, dragging the soapy rag across her shoulders.

Rey swallowed hard as the throbbing in her lower abdomen intensified. It would seem that even though it had just orgasmed, her body wasn't satisfied.

Rey squeezed her eyes shut, trying to inhale slowly through her nose.

Ben moved down her arm, and back up, before pulling the rag down and around to her abdomen.

Rey tensed, her breath hitching, as Ben's cloth-covered hand traveled up to the underside of her breasts. Rey felt the heat from Ben's body as he leaned closer to her, his breath ghosting over her ear. He spent an inordinate amount of time washing her breasts, the rough cloth dragging across her still-sensitive nipples and sending the sensation south.

Rey bit her lip hard when Ben squeezed her breast at the same time he sucked on her neck.

“Bend your knees and pull your feet up as far as you can.”

Rey shivered before she could stop herself.

Her eyes darted around the bathroom as she tried to decide what to do. She couldn’t just obey. She couldn’t. It was bad enough she had begged him for an orgasm. She didn’t care what her body wanted, what stimulus it was responding to, she couldn’t be complicit.

When it became clear that she had no intention of following his order, Ben sighed.

“Very well.”

Before she realized his intentions, Ben reached a long arm around her, hooking his hand behind her knee and pulling it towards her shoulder.

Rey gasped, trying to pull her leg down.

Ben’s grip, however, was surprisingly strong.

“You didn’t want to follow instructions, so now I have to do it for you.”

Rey tried grabbing his hand, to pull his wet fingers away from her leg, but couldn’t find purchase. As hard as he was gripping her, she wouldn’t be surprised to find finger-shaped bruises in the morning.

“Please. I’ll do it. Just let go.”

She felt surrounded by him, having him curled around her as the rag drifted downward. It was too much, too intense.

She sucked in a sharp breath as he dragged the soapy rag across the apex of her thighs.

“There now,” he said, his mouth next to her ear. “All clean.”

Surprisingly, he let go of her leg as he pulled the rag away, dipping it in water and then ringing it over her shoulders, the water traveling in rivulets down her skin, washing away the soap.

Rey remained frozen. Shame and self-loathing pulsed through her with every heartbeat. What was happening to her? She felt insane. Why would she respond with anything other than terror and loathing to this man? Was it this place they were stuck in?

Her eyes roved around the room, as she contemplated these questions. It occurred to her that she was beginning to disassociate from the moment. Warning bells clanged in the back of her mind, but she ignored them. She was stuck, helpless, her body responding enthusiastically to the ministrations of this man who forced her into marriage, took her virginity by force, and was somehow holding her hostage here. She was allowed to disassociate.

A hand slid around her shoulders to her neck. Fingers lightly pressed upwards on her chin.

“Tilt your head back.” The words were spoken like a caress, belying the awful situation she was in.

Rey tilted her head, not bothering to resist.

Her mind continued to race, turning the same questions over in her mind as water poured over her head, wetting her hair before hands began massaging her scalp. She closed her eyes, pretending she was at a spa and not stuck taking a bath with Ben Solo.

So lost in her thoughts was she, she didn't even realize Ben was done washing her hair until he kissed her cheek and stood up, pulling her up as well. He handed her a towel before grabbing one himself and toweling himself dry. When his mouth quirked upward, Rey realized she was staring at him and whipped around, wrapping herself in the towel and stepping out of the tub.

She walked quickly out of the bathroom, heading towards the dresser and pulling open drawers, trying to find underwear.

"What are you looking for?"

Rey didn't answer as she continued pulling open drawers. She managed to find a nightgown, thankful to find it would button up to her neck, and pulled it out. Opening the last drawer and still not finding underwear, she frowned.

When hands landed on her shoulders, Rey jumped, whipping around and holding the nightgown to her towel-wrapped body, droplets of water dripping from her hair.

Ben tracked the droplets' descent towards her breasts before returning to meet her wide eyes. Rey quickly averted her gaze before she realized he was standing in front of her stark naked and snapped her eyes back up to his, heat flooding her face and traveling down her neck.

"I was looking for underwear." Rey answered his question to distract him from her embarrassment.

Amusement glinted in Ben's eyes, mocking her.

He smirked as he reached out to pull the nightgown from Rey's hands. She tightened her grip on the fabric, but he easily pulled her fingers open.

Keeping his eyes on her, he dropped the nightgown to the floor. Rey tried to step back but hit the dresser. Ben placed his hands on either side of her, boxing her in.

Rey tried to tell herself that her rapid breathing was entirely fear based as Ben leaned forward, his eyes dropping to her lips. She held herself rigid, irritated at herself with the desire to lean towards him. She tightened her grip on her towel to keep herself from reaching out to touch his chest.

When he was a hairsbreadth away from her lips, she turned her head and rammed her body against him. He stumbled back a step, most likely due to surprise rather than force, and she ducked under his arm.

She all but ran towards the doorway, anxious to get away before she did something stupid, like started enjoying herself.

"Rey."

She flew out the doorway, every step adding clarity to her thoughts. She heard Ben call her again, warning in his voice, and hurried down the steps and out the front door. It was only



once she was down the front steps that she realized she had nowhere safe to go. She turned to the side, breaking into a full run, barely holding the towel together. No one could see her anyway, so there was no point in worrying about the fact it was flying open as she ran.

Tears pooled in her eyes, falling and flying off her face as she ran. Before she could reach the edge of the cliff, an arm banded around her waist, pulling her against Ben's chest.

She struggled against him, but his other arm banded around her shoulders, holding her tight to him.

"That'll be enough of that."

A shiver of fear went down her spine at the anger in Ben's tone.

"Let go of me." Rey continued to struggle against him, tears falling rapidly down her face. "I don't want you to touch me."

She stamped her heel down on his foot. Ben hissed, but his grip didn't loosen. Instead he tightened his grip to the point Rey could hardly breathe.

"You'll stop resisting, or I'll make things extremely unpleasant for you."

Rey stopped moving.

Relief flooded through her. Things were easier and less confusing when he wasn't trying to be nice. She could keep her thoughts straight.

Ben lowered his lips to her ear.

"Now then. When I let you go, you'll walk back to the bedroom, drop your towel, and do your wifely duty."

Rey closed her eyes and swallowed. She could do it. She could endure his touch if he continued being a misogynistic prick. At least she could keep her sanity.

She nodded once, sharply. Ben's arms fell away from her, and she turned, stepping quickly past him and heading back towards the house.

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Rey dreamed of Ben again, the same Ben who carried a red glowing sword.

*"I know where you are," he said, tilting his head as he gazed at her. Through their connection she could feel the hope he was trying to keep under control. "I can come get you. It's not too late to join me."*

*Rey closed her eyes, swallowing. A range of emotions warred within her. Fear, regret, disappointment, loneliness, and longing all fought for her attention, but it was disappointment that won out. Opening her eyes she whispered, "Yes it is."*

As her previous dreams had done, the scene shifted. She stumbled down a long tunnel, blinding pain wracking through her. *"Leia, it's Ben. He's hurt. I don't know what's happened, but I felt it. He's hurt and I don't know what to do. We have to find him. We have to save him before... before..."*

Rey now looked down at Ben, chained to a wall.

*“Ben.” She started to reach for him, but he flinched away.*

*“Don’t!” He glared at her. “I don’t want your pity.”*

*Rey shook her head, “That’s not —”*

*“Don’t try to lie,” he spat. ‘I can sense your emotions easily.’ He looked away. “Just go.”*

Suddenly the scene shifted into chaos.

*Blaster bolts whizzed by, some close enough that she could feel their heat. Rey wished she had a blaster to fire back with. Instead she raised her light saber, deflecting as many bolts as she could, jumping over downed bodies and slashing at anyone who got too close. She glanced behind her and saw Kylo had lagged behind her. He tripped over bodies but managed to stay upright.*

*“Rey!” he shouted. “Keep going!”*

The scene shifted to Rey holding Ben’s hand. She didn’t know how, but she could sense what he was thinking, that he should have been left to die.

*“No.” Rey’s response was a fiercely spoken whisper. “Never say that.”*

*“Rey...”*

*Ben didn’t get a chance to respond when Rey suddenly leaned forward, pressing her lips to his.*

Rey opened her eyes, blinking rapidly at the early morning light filtering through the window. Ben had once more pulled her against him in the night, his arm around her waist.

She looked at the floor by the dresser, noting the nightgown that had never made it on.

Looking back out the window, trying to ignore the very naked man pressed against her back, Rey pondered her dream. Why did she keep dreaming about herself and Ben? They were such vivid dreams too, as if they were actually happening. Never in her life had she had such vivid dreams. Usually she was lucky if she remembered anything she dreamt, but these past several all stuck in her mind like movies.

Frankly, it pissed her off. Why was her subconscious dreaming up all these ways for her to fall for Ben? Was she really that cracked in the head?

She resisted the urge to sigh, wanting to prolong waking Ben, especially since she could feel his morning wood poking into her.

She felt heat rising into her cheeks as she thought of the previous evening. Apparently once the orgasm machine turned on, it was difficult to turn off. She had just barely resisted orgasming before Ben had collapsed on top of her. Of course, then she had been left near the brink — which might have been worse — but for the sake of her pride, she had absolutely refused to orgasm again. She could not give him the satisfaction.

She tensed when Ben groaned, his arm tightening around her. He nuzzled her neck, pressing a kiss on her shoulder.

His hand traveled up to her breast, lightly kneading as he ground himself against her, sucking lightly on her neck.

Rey opened her mouth in a silent gasp.

*This cannot happen.*

Rey threw his hand off her and stood up, rushing towards the nightgown and pulling it over her head. Without looking back, she strode to the door, down the hallway, and down the stairs. She turned towards the kitchen, her stomach growling.

She expected Ben to follow her, but to her relief, she heard nothing. She paced along the length of the kitchen, her hands opening and closing as she tried to calm the humming in her body, still asking for the orgasm she had denied herself.

Her stomach growling again reminded her why she had come into the kitchen in the first place. Ignoring the throbbing between her legs, Rey walked to the pantry, surveying the shelves. She honestly never wanted to eat oatmeal again, but she was stuck with the same problem as the previous day, namely her lack of cooking skills. At least now she knew not to add so much to the water.

Grabbing down the tin, she placed it on the counter, lighting the stove, and setting a pot of water on to boil.

She resumed her pacing, if for no other reason than to distract herself from the fact she was supremely turned on.

*This can't be normal.*

Didn't women claim headaches to get out of sex? That was a pretty "classic" joke right? And weren't orgasms time consuming to achieve? She'd been to parties where girls talked about how they counted themselves lucky if they got off every third time they had sex. So why the fuck didn't her body get that memo?

Maybe she was a nymphomaniac. She'd never had sex before a couple days ago, but maybe there was something in her that got switched on.

She ignored the fact that sex addiction didn't have an on/off switch, latching onto the idea. It was the only thing that assuaged her guilt and frustration. She just had a problem, something that she could work through.

Hissing from the stove brought Rey out of her thoughts. She opened the tin of oatmeal and then frowned. Three quarters full again. But she had dumped a pretty large quantity of oatmeal into the pot the day before.

"I could be wrong —" Rey jumped, her head snapping up to see Ben standing fully dressed in the doorway. "— but I do not believe that staring at dry oatmeal will cause it to spontaneously cook itself."

Ben walked towards her, his gaze trailing down. Rey had never been so grateful for a formless nightgown.

"Why is there more oatmeal in the tin?"

He stopped walking towards her, her question seeming to catch him off guard.

She swallowed nervously, ignoring the urge to go dry hump him. "I dumped a lot of oatmeal into the pot yesterday. Why is it back to three quarters full?"

Ben shrugged his shoulders. "I quite honestly have no idea."

Rey's brows drew together. "Where do you get your food?"

Ben resumed stalking towards her. "I don't know."

Rey shook her head, tilting her chin up as he drew close. "How can you not know? Don't you get it from somewhere?"

He shrugged again. "The food in the pantry hasn't changed in content or volume the entirety of my stay here. What was present when I was stuck inside the mirror is what has always been here. When I use an item, the next day it is restored. How or why this occurs, I have no idea."

Rey catalogued that away to analyze. It had to mean something. Maybe if she could figure out the way this realm worked, she could figure a way out of it.

She snapped back to reality when Ben pulled the tin of oatmeal out of her hand.

"Now then. Since you did such a dismal job of preparing oatmeal yesterday, I'll show you the proper way to do it."

He set the tin on the counter and put both hands on Rey's shoulders, turning her to face the stove. He stood right behind her, his front brushing her back. It was all she could do not to start grinding against him.

Maybe he had put something in her food and it was just now taking effect. Some sort of sex drug, some early version of ecstasy that made her horny.

His hand traveled from her shoulder to her wrist, his fingers trailing down to cover her hand.

He leaned down, his breath brushing her ear as he spoke.

"Pick up the tin."

Rey bit her lip to stop from moaning, immediately pissed that he had that effect on her. She snatched the tin off the counter and started pouring.

Ben pulled her hand away.

"That's enough. Now," he said, pointing towards the wooden spoons, "grab a spoon and start stirring."

Rey swallowed as she grabbed the spoon, feeling about ready to burst into flames.

"Can you back off?" She cursed inwardly at how obviously needy she sounded.

"Mmm." Ben's voice vibrated near her ear and Rey couldn't stop the shiver that ran through her. "How can I teach you if I'm not properly attentive? Now stir before you burn the oatmeal again."

Rey ground her teeth together and started stirring.

*I'm only doing this because I'm hungry.*

She had to learn to make oatmeal because she couldn't rely on a microwave. That was the only reason she was allowing him to teach her like she was actually going to be cooking for him.

Ben's hand trailed down to her wrist again.

"Slower." He placed his hand over hers and slowed down her erratic stirring.

His other arm snaked around her waist, pulling her against him as he circled his hips in time with the spoon.

*You're getting turned on over making oatmeal. Get a grip.*

Rey bit her lip hard, trying to use the pain to snap her out of whatever the hell was going on. Maybe it was a combination of drugs and latent nymphomania. Whatever it was, she absolutely refused to allow herself to enjoy Ben's ministrations. Maybe she could use yoga and breathing to reset her mind.

She jumped when Ben spoke again. "Turn off the stove."

She complied with shaky hands. He immediately turned her around and crushed his lips to hers. His hands cupped her bottom, pulling her up to her tip toes as his plunged his tongue into her mouth. Rey forgot all the reasons why she refused him, first placing her hands on his shoulders before wrapping her arms around the back of his neck. The only thing she could focus on was the ache between her legs, begging for relief.

She keened when Ben lightly bit her lip, soothing the bite with his tongue. He pulled up, smoothing his hands along Rey's legs to encourage her to wrap her legs around him. Rey did so eagerly, grinding against him, moaning at the relief of delicious friction. Her hands clenched Ben's hair, pulling hard at it. He growled low in his throat and walked them backward, setting Rey on the counter. Once his hands were free, he quickly slid a hand underneath the hem of her nightgown. Rey wanted him to relieve the pressure between her legs, but instead, he moved north and pinched her nipple. The zing of sensation traveling to her core made her moan again.

He broke the kiss to look at her, kneading her breast as he did so. Rey closed her eyes, lost in sensation, panting.

The hand not kneading her breast started trailing up her thigh, pushing the nightgown up with it.

"Would you like me to keep touching you?"

Rey groaned as his fingers traced circles on her inner thighs.

"I'm afraid I didn't hear your response." He stopped moving. "Would you like me to keep touching you?"

"Yes." Rey's voice came out high and breathy but she didn't care. She just wanted him to restart his ascent towards her aching center.

Instead, Ben pulled his hands away entirely and stepped back.

“Unfortunately, I don’t have time. My breakfast is getting cold.”

Rey’s eyes flew open in time to see Ben smirk at her before he turned away. She stared, feeling doused with cold water as she watched him walk to get a bowl, scoop out oatmeal, and leave her behind as he walked into the dining room.

## Chapter 12

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### Chapter 12

Rey stood frozen, staring at the doorway, chest heaving as if she had just run a marathon.

What had just happened?

*You told him you wanted him to touch you. And then he left.*

Rey shook her head, as if by doing so she could change the horrifying truth.

The throbbing between her legs, however, mocked her.

She looked around the kitchen. For what, she didn't know. Probably her dignity.

Swallowing thickly, she slowly slid off the counter, stumbling as she landed on weak legs. When she brushed back her hair, her hand shook. Her entire body thrummed, begging for the release it had been denied twice now.

She would just have to do a little self-care.

Rey bit her lip, glancing at the both doorways. One led to the dining room, where she knew Ben would probably give her a self-satisfied smirk. There would be snow in hell before she willingly endure that. Anger hummed low beneath her mortification, her jaw aching from how hard she was clenching it. The other doorway led into the hallway. She wondered what the odds were that she could make it back to her bedroom and get herself off without Ben finding out. He would probably hear her walking up the creaky stairs like he had when she had tried to smuggle food. As she glanced between both doorways, a door in the middle snagged her attention.

The pantry.

She glanced nervously at the dining room doorway. It would certainly take less time, but the risk of discovery was pretty high. What if he came back in for more oatmeal? Or to ask what was taking so long?

She looked back at the pantry. She would have to be quiet.

Strangely that idea made her breath catch.

Rey rolled her eyes at herself as she walked stiffly to the pantry. She placed a hand on the doorknob and slowly twisted, praying neither the knob nor the door would creak. The door opened silently and Rey slipped inside, closing it behind her.

Shrouded in darkness, Rey immediately pulled up her nightgown, stuck her hand between her legs. She nearly cried out before reminding herself she had to be quiet.

*Do you want him to catch you?*

Her breath quickened as her legs grew weaker. She reached out to grip a shelf, leaning her head on her hand.

*What will he do if he catches you masturbating?*

Rey opened her mouth in silent gasp, her whole body beginning to tremble at the thought, the constant tension now nearing unbearable. She whimpered, wanting the relief of release.

*Be quiet.*

Rey's knees threatened to buckle at the thought of getting caught. She bit her lip hard to keep from moaning.

In the back of her mind, she recoiled at the fact she was getting off thinking about Ben, but the need for release made her shove her concerns back into the far corner of her mind. She could berate herself later.

*He's going to come looking for you if you don't hurry up.*

Rey felt like she was about to spontaneously combust. Sweat dripped down her forehead onto her hand, gripping the shelf so tightly she thought she heard it creak.

*He'll call you depraved.*

Rey swallowed thickly, her breath stuttering. She had never felt so much tension and every time she thought it couldn't intensify, it did. She strained to hear over her own panting, now legitimately worried that he would come looking for her.

*You're taking too long. Any minute he'll open the door and find you with your hand between your legs.*

Tears pooled in her eyes as the release she craved remained steadily out of reach. She was losing her mind. The release was *right there* and she couldn't reach it.

She bit her lip to hold in a sob. Her body was shaking, her legs barely strong enough to support her weight, and her heart was pounding. Her body was becoming overly sensitized, each pass of her fingers caused shocks to radiate outward. And yet, she couldn't come.

She swallowed again when an idea came to her. Her mind recoiled, her hand pausing in its ministrations. After a brief moment, however, Rey decided to ignore the warning bells. At this point, she didn't care what it took to get her to come. All the times in the past when she'd failed at orgasming, she had never been this keyed up. She felt like she would go insane if she didn't come.

*Orgasm denial should be a how they torture prisoners.*

Even though it was dark, Rey closed her eyes, chewing on her lip, her breath stuttering as she prepared to do something she would undeniably regret later.

She pulled up the memory of Ben pressing her wrists into the bed by her head. She recalled twisting her body, his groan as she rubbed against him, the feel of him inside her, her leg over his shoulder as he drove in deeper, touching that spot inside her that drove her mad.

Rey panted, letting go of the shelf in favor of pinching her nipples through the thin fabric of her nightgown, squeezing her breast as she remembered Ben doing the same last night in the bath before he bit the side of her neck.



The memory of that sensation finally — *finally* — caused the damn to break. Rey crumpled to the ground, pressing a hand hard against her mouth to try to quiet the scream as her orgasm ripped through her. She fell over, panting, her arms and legs jerking as spots flickered in her vision.

When it was over, Rey lay panting on the floor of the pantry.

*Holy shit.*

Once the high began to abate, Rey's stomach turned, the concerns she'd pushed back now coming to the forefront of her mind. She had used thoughts of Ben to get herself off.

Rey shook her head, pushing the thoughts back once more. She did what she had to do. Something about this place was driving her crazy. She stood, her legs wobbling, and brushed her hands down the sides of her nightgown, trying to straighten it.

It was only as she placed a hand on the doorknob that she heard the sound of running water.

Her stomach dropped. Ben was out there. How long had he been there?

She contemplated staying in the pantry until he left, but he would undoubtedly come looking for her and she would not have him finding her cowering in the pantry.

Squaring her shoulders, Rey slowly turned the knob and walked out.

Ben turned off the water, using a towel to dry his hands as he turned towards her.

"Did you find anything to satisfy your hunger in the pantry?"

Rey pressed her lips together at Ben's self-satisfied smirk. He clearly knew what she had done, but why was he so smug? Her face grew heated and she struggled to tamp down her embarrassment. There was no way for him to know that she had thought of him to come.

Yet the glint in his eyes seemed to say otherwise.

Realizing that she hadn't answered his question, Rey cleared her throat.

"Yes."

Ben reached over to the pot of oatmeal.

"Wonderful. Then I'm sure you're quite satisfied and won't be needing the oatmeal."

Before Rey could say a word, Ben dumped the entire pot into the sink.

Rey didn't exactly mourn the loss of the oatmeal itself, but her stomach clenched in hunger as she watched the gloppy oatmeal pour into the sink. She felt panic creeping up at the thought of a missed meal.

Ben left the pot in the sink, turning back to her, a simmering anger just beneath the smugness of his expression causing tendrils of fear to wind their way through her head.

"Now that you've successfully satisfied your hunger, you can finish cleaning the kitchen."

Rey clenched her jaw at the double entendre. He definitely knew what she had been doing. He probably had heard her scream.

She lifted her chin, ignoring her fear and looking directly at Ben's smug face.

"Yes. It was great to find something that actually satisfies me. I've been unsatisfied since I got here."

Ben narrowed his eyes.

"That's quite interesting, since I was led to believe that you quite enjoyed your *meal* last night."

Rey shrugged her shoulders, ignoring the warning bells that Ben's obvious annoyance elicited.

"It was ok. I didn't like it enough to request the recipe though."

She walked towards him, forcing herself to act confident, squaring her shoulders and keeping her chin lifted as she neared him. Ben watched her through narrowed eyes, a glint of something in them that Rey didn't want to analyze.

She clenched her jaw hard when she reached him and he didn't move out of her way. She reached up, intent on pushing him out of the way, but he grabbed her wrists. Pulling them down, he held them behind her back as he pressed himself against her. Rey stiffened, closing her eyes when he leaned down to brush a kiss against her lips. He didn't try to deepen the kiss, however, instead pressing kisses along the line of her jaw. Rey's breath quickened, her still sensitive center throbbing, sending a strange mix of pain and pleasure through her.

When he reached her ear, he flicked out his tongue, slowly licking along the shell of her ear. Before she could stop herself, Rey keened.

"Your pleasure belongs to me," Ben whispered. "If I find out you've been touching yourself again, I'll have to punish you."

Rey's eyes flew open. She ripped her hands out of his grasp and shoved him. It was like shoving a brick wall.

"I don't know what you're talking about. Get away from me." She shoved at him again, irritated as he simply looked down at her, the ghost of a smile on his face.

In a snap, her grabbed her jaw with one hand. She tried pulling him away, but his painfully strong grip refused to budge.

"Let. Go. Of. Me." She could barely get the words out, so tight was his grip.

Ben leaned forward until their noses were nearly touching, his eyes moving between hers. Rey's heart pounded at the simmering anger she found there.

"I'm serious, Rey." His eerily soft tone might as well have been a shout from the way fear spread through her. "If I catch you touching yourself again, you'll be dealing with more than the loss of breakfast. Do I make myself clear?"

Rey didn't answer, narrowing her eyes at him as her breath quickened. She knew she shouldn't provoke him, but something in her refused to cower.

Ben tightened his grip on her jaw, his knuckles whitening. The grip irritated her still bruised face and Rey couldn't help the whimper as her cheek began throbbing.

Shaking his hand to jostle her head, his sharp voice echoed off the walls.

“Answer me!”

Rey stiffly nodded her head once, barely able to with the iron tight grip he had on her jaw.

Letting go of her face, Ben stepped back, running a hand through his hair before straightening his jacket. Rey watched him through the haze of fear his shout had induced.

“Very well then. I’ll leave you to your chores. Clean the kitchen and then do the laundry. The beds need to be stripped and I have a rather large pile of dirty clothing that needs tending to.”

Without waiting for Rey to respond, Ben turned on his heel and strode out of the kitchen, leaving Rey with a throbbing face and pounding heart.

## Chapter 13

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### Chapter 13

Rey stared at the doorway a beat before white hot anger flashed through her, eradicating her fear.

Before she had time to think rationally about it, she strode out of the kitchen, fists clenched at her side. Ben turned as she neared, clearly having heard her footsteps charging towards him. His eyebrows lifted, but before he could say anything, Rey shoved him hard with both hands.

Obviously not expecting that, he stumbled back a step as Rey stepped forward to shove him again.

“Fuck you, asshole!”

Rey pulled back her arm to deck him, but Ben grabbed her hand as she swung at his face. Anger burned hot in his eyes, but Rey was still too angry to be afraid. He used his grip on her fist to push her backwards. She stumbled as he reached up to grasp her neck and shove her back until she hit the wall, his hand so massive he kept her pinned without cutting off her air supply. When he spoke, it was through clenched teeth.

“It would seem that I have been too lenient with you.”

Rey clawed at his hand, trying to rip it away, too angry to care that he had her pinned by the neck.

“I’m not your fucking maid.”

Ben leaned closer, eyes flashing. “No, but you are my wife and as such you *will* do what I ask.”

“Fuck you.”

Ben pulled her forward before slamming her back against the wall, her teeth rattling.

“You will stop using profanities! You sound like a two-penny whore!”

White spots danced in Rey’s vision as pain radiated from back to front, making her wince.

“I’d rather be a whore than your wife.”

Ben’s grip tightened, starting to cut off her airway. Rey gasped for air, her anger dissipating into fear as she frantically clawed at his hands.

Ben leaned in closer. “If you would rather be a whore, I can certainly treat you like one.”

“You... already... do.” Rey gasped the words out.

Ben frowned, leaning back and dropping his hand. Rey bent over, raggedly pulling air into her lungs. When the spots finally disappeared from her vision, Rey held onto the wall as she

straightened. Now that her anger had been overrun by fear, she was finding it difficult to remember why she decided to provoke the man who had starved her and bruised her cheek.

When Rey dared look at him, his eyes were narrowed and a muscle in his jaw ticked. She straightened her shoulders and lifted her head, pretending to be unafraid.

“What is your problem?”

She was happy when her voice came out steady, if not a bit raspy.

“Why are you so obsessed with making me into some fantasy wife?”

Ben looked away, his jaw ticking again. “You’re my soulmate.”

Rey scoffed. “So you’ve said. That doesn’t explain why you’re a misogynistic prick. If we were really soulmates, you’d treat me with respect.”

Ben’s eyes snapped back to hers. “Like the respect you’ve shown me?”

Rey crossed her arms. “What have you done to deserve my respect? Was it the time you smacked me so hard you bruised my face? Or perhaps it was starving me for days? Or I know,” she snapped her fingers, ‘it was when you forced me to have sex with you. But I’ve only been here a few days. There’s still time for you to earn my respect by,’ she leaned forward, voice raised, “fucking choking me to death!”

Ben’s faced darkened. “Maybe I wouldn’t have to use such extreme force with you, if you weren’t so ill-mannered and crass.”

Rey threw her arms up, barking out humorless laugh. “It’s like talking to a brick wall. Why do I even bother?”

She slid past him, headed towards the front door. The grounds might not offer her any hiding places, but at least she could go kick the barrier and watch the ocean.

“Where do you think you’re going?”

Rey turned, walking backwards. “To get away from you.” She flipped him off. “And by the way, there’s no way the universe would make a misogynistic asshole from fucking *eighteen-eighty-five* my soulmate.”

She turned back around, shoving the door open and stomping down the steps. Her shoulders remained tense, waiting for him to follow her, to punish her again. He had choked her and she had responded by insulting him.

What had she been thinking?

A shiver ran down her spine as she lifted a hand to her throat. Tears pricked behind her eyes as the full weight of the last hour landed on her. She had felt so many things, all of them strongly, that she felt like she had mental whiplash.

She started running, pushing herself to her limit, head down as she blinked away the tears. She was tired of crying, tired of being afraid, tired of feeling like she is going crazy. Her throat burned with each inhalation, but she ignored it. When she reached the edge of the cliff, she stopped, bending over to catch her breath, suddenly feeling dizzy. Maybe running after just getting choked wasn’t such a good idea.

She lifted her head and looked out at the ocean, the sunshine glittering back at her, nearly blinding. She straightened, walking forward, hands out until she touched the barrier. She still half expected that she would feel a jolt when she touched it, like it was electrified, but it felt like nothing but clear glass. She pressed her forehead against it, staring at the water until it felt like the light had been permanently burned into her retinas.

She jumped when a hand snaked around her waist and pulled her against a firm chest. Ben nosed through her hair, his lips finding her ear.

“You may think it unbelievable that the universe would make me your soulmate, but everything that has happened to me and my family has left me with little doubt that the universe thrives on chaos. God has been laughing at me for well over one hundred years, since before I got stuck in this god forsaken house. My life has been one tragedy over another, the current tragedy in my arms this very moment. So, believe me when I say that I find it completely believable that my soulmate turns out to be a foul-mouthed brat so depraved that she pleasures herself in the same place I keep my food.”

He punctuated his words by cupping between her legs. Rey stiffened at the contact before shoving his hand away.

“Don’t touch me.”

Ben hummed, the sound sending a shiver of arousal straight to her lower abdomen. “If I recall, it has been less than an hour since you told me you wanted me to touch you. Do you take it back? How fickle.”

Rey, irritated by her body’s response, scoffed as Ben began kissing the line of her jaw. She froze, stuck between her anger and sudden arousal. Ben was an irritating, manipulative, abusive prick. She shouldn’t want anything to do with him. And yet...

Ben turned her face towards him, the arm banded around her waist pulling her hard against him. She felt his hard length pressing against her, but all her focus was on Ben kissing ever closer to her mouth. Against all logic, she suddenly wanted nothing more than to his lips on hers, his tongue in her mouth, his teeth biting her lip. She closed her eyes, trying to remember all the reasons why she hated him, but her thoughts kept turning back to Ben’s lips, now on the corner of her mouth.

Her breath hitched when he hesitated, his breath ghosting onto her lips.

“Open your eyes.”

Rey complied, blinking rapidly at how close he was. Her stomach did a strange summersault at the heated look in his eyes and she again tried to remind herself that he was a pig.

“I know exactly how you achieved your orgasm.”

Ben brushed his nose against hers as Rey’s brows drew together in confusion.

“What?”

Ben kissed the corner of her mouth, the tip of his tongue darting out to lick her.

“I know you thought of me.”

“You can’t know that.” Too late Rey realized she hadn’t refuted his claim. She felt heat creeping up her neck as Ben’s mouth quirked up.

“I can.” He kissed the other corner of her mouth and Rey’s breath hitched, wanting him to hurry up and kiss her. “Do you want to know how?”

She swallowed, wanting to know the answer but not wanting to admit it.

“I have been stuck in this realm for one hundred and thirty-four years and the only time I’ve been able to achieve an orgasm has been when I’ve been inside your deliciously warm, wet cunt.”

Rey’s abdomen tightened at Ben’s uncharacteristically crude language. Without thinking, she closed the space between them, pressing her lips against his. Ben stiffened in surprise as she reached behind her to pull his head closer, running her tongue against the seam of his mouth.

That seemed to jolt him out of his surprise, letting go of her waist to cup the other side of her face. Rey turned around and pressed herself against him, her hands going to his sides and grasping at his shirt. Ben swept his tongue inside her mouth and Rey groaned, kissing him back hungrily. He let go of her face, his hands sweeping down her sides to her ass, grasping both cheeks. Rey hopped up, wrapping her legs around Ben’s waist so she could properly grind against his now very obvious arousal. Ben swung them around and pressed Rey against the barrier.

She knew she shouldn’t be doing this, for a multitude of reasons. She didn’t know why she *wanted* to do this. The man was revolting. He had done so many bad things to her and yet the moment he got close it was like her body shut off her brain, demanding that physical gratification take precedence over moral self-respect.

She pulled her calves forward, pulling Ben closer as she raked her fingernails down his scalp, grinding into him. He grunted into her mouth, so she did it again, rhythmically rolling her hips against him, biting his lip and pulling his hair. His hands on her ass gripped her tighter, helping her rub against him while he fought to take back control of their kissing, pressing her head against the barrier.

“Do you like when I do that?” Rey’s voice came out breathy, feeling lightheaded as all her blood rushed south.

Ben merely groaned in answer, kissing down her throat and sucking on the juncture between her neck and shoulder.

Rey keened, her voice now high pitched. “Do you want me to touch you?”

“Does my selfish wife actually want to do something for her husband?”

Rey opened her eyes, her head thrown back so that she was looking at the sky above them. Not answering his question, she said, “You’ll have to put me down.”

Ben’s grip on her tightened for a moment before he took a half-step back so Rey could lower her legs. His hands still gripped her ass so that she was standing on tip toe as he against pressed his lips to hers. There wasn’t much room for her to reach between them, but Rey managed to slide a hand down to the tent in Ben’s trousers.

She moaned, kissing Ben hard as she lightly trailed her fingers up the hard length. Ben made an impatient noise and Rey smiled against his lips before palming him roughly, squeezing him through the fabric. It should have been weird. Rey had never done anything really, certainly never touched a cock, clothed or otherwise. Yet she almost instinctively knew what to do.

*Must be all the porn.*

Ben responded by crushing her against him again, bruising her lips with the ferocity of his kiss. Rey lightly pulled back, Ben chasing her lips.

"I can't touch you if you don't give me any space."

Ben sighed, sounding exasperated, but turned them around so that his back was against the barrier. Rey looked him in the eyes, putting a hand over his mouth to stop him from kissing her as she slowly knelt in front of him. Ben's eyes widened when he realized what she was planning to do.

Without breaking eye contact, Rey removed her hand from his mouth, trailing it down to the buttons on his trousers. She slowly pulled them apart, watching as Ben's lips parted, his breath stuttering.

When the last button was undone, Rey slowly pulled his shirt up, her own heart hammering now. She glanced down at his cock before looking back up at him, slowly raising her hand.

"What do you want me to do?"

"Wh-what?"

Rey smiled, gratified that she had him so out of his mind.

"I've never done this before, you know. You'll have to tell me what you want me to do."

Ben blinked rapidly. "Oh. Put —" He broke off when his voice cracked, clearing his throat. "Put it in your mouth."

Rey looked back down, getting dizzy from how quickly her heart was racing. She hesitantly grasped him and then leaned forward slowly, relishing the sound of his panting. When she breathed on him, he groaned again.

She stopped moving and flicked her eyes back up to him. He was watching her with his mouth open.

Rey smiled, pulling back, dropping her hand, and standing up.

"I better go do that laundry."

"What?"

Her smile widened at his high pitch tone.

"We wouldn't want you to have to do it yourself now would we?"

Rey turned on her heel and started walking towards the house. After a few steps, she stopped and turned back, happy to see Ben still staring at her with his mouth open.



“Oh, and don’t forget, if my pleasure is yours, then your pleasure is mine. If I see you yanking yourself, I’ll hit you with the frying pan.”

Without waiting for a reply, Rey turned back around, smiling widely for the first time since she’d arrived.

## Chapter 14

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### Chapter 14

Rey, still in her nightgown, sat in a chair, reading *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and chewing on dried fruit. She had moved foster homes a lot during middle school and had managed to completely miss it as an assigned reading. The book she held looked brand new and certainly nicer than anything she had ever read.

She couldn't quite concentrate on it however, a smirk on her lips as she waited for Ben to come barging in. She had no doubt he would have something to say about her being dressed in a nightgown and eating dried fruit when he'd thrown away her oatmeal. On a side note, she was surprised by how fantastic the fruit tasted. Then again, she supposed everything found in Ben's cupboard was organic, so maybe it shouldn't be much of a surprise.

"What are you doing?"

Ben's voice was sharp and Rey struggled not to laugh as she turned a page. She felt some trepidation at his tone, knowing she would almost certainly pay for humiliating him, but quashed it. She didn't have the time or energy to let a douchebag like Ben lord himself over her.

"I'm reading."

Ben huffed. "Yes. I can see that. Why aren't you dressed?"

Rey shrugged. "I can't put on the corset without your help and you were... indisposed."

Her lips twitched as she flicked her eyes up to him. His hands were curled into fists and his face was flushed, though whether it was embarrassment or anger was tough to tell. Either way, she had rattled him with her barb.

"Well, now that I'm available," he spoke through clenched teeth, "you will dress. You can't walk around the house in your nightgown all day."

Rey pretended to think, tapping her chin with her index finger. "No, I don't think I will. This nightgown's pretty comfy." She returned her gaze to the novel, smirking.

A beat of silence.

"What?"

"I said, I don't think I will." Rey turned the page again, though she hadn't read anything on the previous page.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Ben approaching. Calmly, she reached between the cushion and the side of the chair, pulling out a pistol, cocking it, and pointing it at him, raising her gaze once more.

Ben froze, blanching as his eyes widened and mouth dropped open. When Rey smiled at him, however, he snapped his jaw shut, his eyes heating with anger.

“It would appear we’re at an impasse,” Rey said.

“Where did you get that?” His eyes flicked to the gun and then back at her face.

“Gun ownership 101. Don’t keep your gun where anyone can find it.” Rey smiled. ‘I was looking for something sharp to stab you with and found this instead.’ She cocked her head, pretending to consider the weapon before looking back at him. “I think this works much better than a knife, don’t you?”

Ben narrowed his eyes. “You wouldn’t dare.”

Rey raised her eyebrows in mock innocence. “You’re welcome to test that theory, though I should probably warn you that the consequences could include you bleeding out on this lovely rug.”

Ben considered her through narrow eyes. Rey dropped the act to let her rage show. She finally had the upper hand on the bastard. Truthfully, she didn’t know she had had it in her to be this ballsy, and she doubted whether she’d actually pull the trigger, but the look of uncertainty on Ben’s face certainly made the farce worth the effort.

“If you shoot me, you’ll be all alone.”

Rey was pleased to hear a note of panic in his voice. She shrugged.

“After the life I’ve had, I could use some solitude.”

His adam’s apple bobbed. “You have no idea what it’s like to be alone for as long as I have.” His eyes bore into hers. “You’ll probably hang yourself within a year.”

Rey scoffed. “Please. If a spoiled, entitled asshole like you could do it, then it can’t be that hard.”

He started to take a step forward but halted when Rey raised her eyebrows, shifting the gun to point directly at his heart.

“I think you’re close enough,” she said.

“Rey.” Her heart did a weird flutter thing when he said her name. She ignored it. “I had something to keep me sane all these years. Tell me, what would you have to look forward to, what thing would you hang on to when the threat of madness at the quiet, at not being able to see or touch the world outside these borders, becomes all-consuming?”

Rey’s grip tightened on the pistol as his words ran through her, sending a tendril of fear down her spine. To be frank, she hated being alone. She always had. The lack of friends from moving foster home to foster home in elementary school had caused her to make up an imaginary friend. When she finally settled into Unkar Plutt’s home, stayed for longer than a few months, she did everything she could to surround herself with friends. She stayed busy. When she wasn’t working on homework, desperate to get out of her situation, to give the finger to foster care statistics, she was spending every spare moment with her friends. That’s how she had met Rose, a year older than she was.

Rey frowned when something in Ben’s little speech stood out to her. She narrowed her eyes.

“What did you have to look forward to?”

The corners of Ben’s mouth curled upwards, but bitterness shone in his eyes. “You.”

Rey rolled her eyes. “Give me a break. If you think I’m some love-sick girly girl type who sits around hoping to find her prince charming, then you’re wasting your time. Try again.”

Ben raised his eyebrows. “It’s the truth.”

“You spent over a hundred years waiting for me?” Rey’s tone was flat. Did he think she was an idiot?

Ben nodded, clasping his hands in front of him. “The mirror shows one’s soulmate yes? I knew you would arrive eventually.”

Rey’s vision glossed over as she turned his words over in her mind. He was crazy. First of all, the logistics of having your soulmate born over a century after you make no sense. If people are being born hundreds of years after their soulmate, then the universe is even more fucked up than anyone knew. Second, the mirror wasn’t some sort of crystal ball. It couldn’t show the future. Ben had to be talking in the generic sense. He wasn’t waiting for *her*. He was just waiting for his soulmate and thought it was her because she had popped into this weird dimension.

“Have you started having the dreams, yet?”

Ben’s question cut through Rey’s musings and she realized she had lowered the gun. Raising it again, she tried to keep her voice even.

“What?”

“The dreams. Of us. Have you been having them?”

Rey swallowed. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

There was no way he could know she’d been dreaming about the pair of them in different scenarios.

“The panic in your eyes says otherwise.” He smirked and Rey’s finger twitched on the trigger. “Have you had the one where I’m a duke and you’re the lowly orphan I save from a man called Plutt?”

Rey felt a pulse run through her body at Ben’s mention of Plutt. She hadn’t ever mentioned her foster father’s name. She was sure of it. How could he know about Plutt? Maybe she had been talking in her sleep.

“No?” Ben raised his eyebrows in mock innocence. ‘Perhaps you’ve had the more disturbing variety. The one where I murder your husband and take you by his corpse?’ He smirked. “I must admit, that one is quite shocking. I questioned my own sanity the first time I dreamt it.”

Rey wanted to ask if he had had the dream more than once. Once had been enough, so disturbing had the events been. She had fallen for the man who murdered her husband, who had forced himself on her. She repressed a shudder

"I don't know," she said. "I don't find that one so unbelievable, seeing as you enjoy forcing yourself on me when you know I want nothing to do with you."

Ben sighed, exasperated. "How many times must we go through this? I did not force myself on you. You're my wife."

"Yeah well, in the world I live in, when a woman says no and you do it anyway, it's rape. Even when she's your wife."

"Then the world has gone truly mad."

Rey laughed, humorlessly. "Of course, you think that. Do you get your jollies off me fighting against you? Is that it? You only get hard when you know I don't want it?"

Ben narrowed his eyes, shooting daggers at her as he crossed his arms. "And I suppose giving you an orgasm in the bath last night was forcing myself on you? Or are you just too afraid to admit that you feel for me what I feel for you."

Rey clenched her jaw, talking through her teeth. "If what you feel for me is loathing, then yes I will admit we feel the same." Her anger started spiking, her hand shaking as she kept the pistol pointed at him. "The body reacts to stimulus. Just because you managed to give me an orgasm, doesn't mean anything. I hated it. I want to take another bath just so I can scrub you off me. I would peel off my skin if I could."

"I see." Ben put on another innocent expression. "Then I suppose you debased yourself in the pantry by thinking over something else besides me?"

"Yes." Rey said the lie immediately, not even needing to think about whether or not she wanted to lie. It was humiliating and completely undercut her point if she admitted she'd gotten off with thoughts of him.

Amusement filled Ben's eyes as he smirked at her. "No. You're lying."

"I'm not." Rey fought to keep her voice steady.

Ben took a half step forward. Rey gripped the pistol tightly, her finger twitching on the trigger.

"Then what did you think about?"

"I got off to my high school boyfriend." The lie slipped easily out of her mouth. She hadn't had a high school boyfriend, but Ben didn't know and didn't need to know.

"What was his name?"

"Finn." Rey winced internally at using Rose's boyfriend's name but it was the first name to pop into her head and neither of them would ever know.

"And what was Finn's last name?"

Rey froze, her mind blanking. Had Rose ever mentioned his last name? Rey couldn't remember. But it didn't matter. She needed to say something. Anything. The longer she waited, the more obvious the lie was.

"Smith."

“Are you sure about that?” Ben’s smirk as he took another half step closer grated on her nerves.

“Yes.” Rey ground her teeth together. “Don’t take another step.”

“Finn Smith was the name of your high school boyfriend?”

She didn’t like the amusement in his tone.

“Yes.”

He took yet another step towards her.

“I said don’t take another step!” Rey swallowed at the panic in her voice as she raised the pistol. She clutched it tightly to keep it from shaking. What was happening? She had a gun pointed at him and yet she was the one who was panicking. It was his mentioning the dreams. It had to be. It was throwing her off.

Ben took yet another step, completely disregarding her threats. Rey hastily stood, using her other hand to steady the one holding the pistol, her eye running straight down the barrel.

“Do you think I won’t shoot you? Is that it? Because I will.” Rey pressed her lips together at the catch in her voice.

*Fuck.*

Her finger twitched on the trigger again.

*Just do it. Just pull the trigger and this whole nightmare is over.*

Ben paused, cocking his head to the side as he watched her. Rey held his gaze, wanting to look away, but forcing herself not to.

Rey willed her finger to move, but it was like she was paralyzed. She grit her teeth.

*Just shoot the damned bastard. What is wrong with you?*

She didn’t need her subconscious to answer that question. She wasn’t a murderer. Not even when she was trapped in an alternate dimension with a certified crazy creep.

A slow smile spread across Ben’s face as he watched her internal struggle. Rey’s anger spiked again and before she even knew what she was doing, she shifted the gun to the right and pulled the trigger.

## Chapter 15

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### Chapter 15

Time seemed to slow down, the bullet traveling through the air as Rey's heart pounded in her ears. It shouldn't have been possible for her to see it, traveling so quickly and so fast, but she tracked it through the air with wide eyes, silently screaming for it to miss.

The bullet sliced through Ben's bicep and time sped back up, Rey gasping.

Ben shouted, grasping his arm and collapsing to his knees.

*Shit.*

*Fuck!*

"Shit."

Rey dropped the gun, staring at Ben in horror as blood spilled from between his fingers.

"Fuck. Shit shit shit."

Rey took a step towards Ben and then stepped back, looking like she was dancing a two-step as she waffled between going to him and sheer panic.

Ben lifted his head, glaring at her, pure venom his eyes. Rey's heart leapt into her throat, the fear she had ignored earlier coming back to her in full force.

"You shot me." Loathing dripped off of every word and Rey's stomach dropped.

She didn't stop to wonder why she was panicking, why the idea of Ben hating her suddenly felt like she had swallowed tarantulas. She opened her mouth to speak, but nothing came out and she ended up resembling a fish gasping for air.

She ran out of the library and to the kitchen. She was halfway there before she even realized what she was doing. She had to get something to staunch the bleeding. She needed bandages. Sterile bandages. She didn't know anything about bullet wounds. Thankfully she had avoided that scene in high school. Though Plutt hadn't been exactly ideal, at least he'd had a house in relatively benign part of town. But she did know she needed to stop the bleeding and get some sterile bandages.

When she entered the kitchen, she grabbed a pot, set it in the sink, and turned on the water, only then noticing the ringing in her ears. She turned in a circle trying to figure out what she could use as a bandage. Her eyes caught on a cloth rag. She ran over to it, trying to remember those old civil war movies she had to watch in high school. She needed to rip it into strips. Pulling at it, Rey only succeeded in getting frustrated.

Stamping her foot, now the second time in her life she had done it, she howled in frustration. The sound of water was sloshing over the edge of the pot made its way to her ears. Rey raced over and shut off the faucet, tipping the pot to drain some water before turning on the stove, cursing when it took more than one attempt to get the fire to light.

*You shot a man.*

She told herself to shut up. She didn't have time to think about the fact she'd actually shot Ben. Never mind she hadn't hit someplace vital. Though, for all she knew, she could have hit an artery. With that thought, she realized she had left him bleeding on the floor. Grabbing the towel by the sink, Rey raced back into the library.

Her eyes widened when she saw the blood. Surely it was too much. Ben's entire sleeve was soaked. He lay on his back, the blood dripping down onto the rug beneath him. Rushing over to him, Rey's heart pounded, the sound of blood rushing through her ears drowning out the last of the ringing.

"Come to finish me off?" Ben's voice came out a rasp and Rey swallowed at how pale his face was, his lips nearly white.

*Fuck.*

"Shut up." She tried to make her voice stern but it came out sounding scared. She had definitely hit an artery. He shouldn't have bled so much. Shit. She should have put a compress on it immediately.

Rey's hands shook as she batted away his hand and pulled on his sleeve, ripping it open so she could see the wound. It looked clean at least, not ragged. She pressed the towel to the hole and looked up, trying to figure out if the bullet had exited. She couldn't concentrate on anything, couldn't see anything. She stopped, closing her eyes.

*Deep breath. Do not lose your shit now.*

Opening her eyes again, her gaze was immediately drawn to a bullet hole in the wall next to the doorway. She breathed a sigh of relief. The bullet had gone straight through. At least she didn't have to try to pretend she knew how to dig a bullet out of an arm. Of course, now that meant she needed another towel for the other side of his arm.

Grabbing his hand, she pressed it on the towel.

"Keep putting pressure on it, ok?"

Ben didn't respond. Rey snapped her fingers in front of his face, her heart now in her throat.

"Ben!"

When he continued to stare at the wall, Rey slapped his face. Not hard, but hard enough that he finally looked at her. She swallowed at the betrayal in his eyes.

She would think about that later.

"Press the towel as hard as you can. I'm going to go grab another one for the other side."

Ben blinked slowly before tilting his head down in what Rey thought must have been a nod.

*Good enough.*



Rey jumped up and raced back into the kitchen. The pot of water was a rolling boil, the stove hissing as drops splashed onto the fire below. Rey hurried into the pantry, trying to find more towels. When none were there, she started pulling drawers open roughly. She needed something to make bandages with. She had to sterilize them. Screaming in frustration at not knowing where anything was kept, Rey raced back out of the kitchen and up the stairs, taking them two at a time. She ran into her room, opening her drawers and pulling out a chemise. It was linen. Perfect.

She hurried back down the stairs. When she entered the kitchen, her eye immediately went to a knife. She snatched it up, stabbing it through the linen and pulling it up. Once the rip was started, Rey had no problem pulling it apart. She stabbed the knife in several other times and then ripped the garment into strips.

*Shit, I forgot to go back with another towel.*

Rey picked up the linen strips and tossed them into the boiling water, ignoring that the pot was now so full it was overflowing. She grabbed a wooden spoon and shoved the strips down into the water. Then she grabbed the rest of her chemise and raced back into the library.

When she knelt down by Ben, his eyes were closed. She panicked, stomach dropping, before she realized his chest was still rising and falling.

“Ben.”

He didn’t so much as twitch. She hoped he had passed out from the stress and pain, and not from the blood loss. Grabbing his shoulder and hip, Rey attempted to roll him onto his side. She was no match for the man’s dead weight however. She growled in frustration and instead pressed the bunched up chemise to the underside of his arm. Ben’s hand and towel had slipped off as she tried to move him. Her heart flew back into her throat when she realized the wound wasn’t bleeding much. She prayed to whatever god would listen that it was because his blood was clotting.

She left the blood-soaked towel on the floor, tying the chemise around his arm instead, trying to get it tight enough that it would exert the necessary pressure until she could clean the wound and redress it. Staring at her bloody handywork, Rey sighed. It would just have to work for now.

Her initial adrenaline rush was starting to crash. She stood shakily, her legs nearly bucking underneath her.

*You don’t have time to fall apart unless you really want to spend who knows how long here by yourself.*

Rey gritted her teeth and straightened her spine, forcing herself to compartmentalize what was happening. She could think about things later. Right now, she had to make sure she didn’t just make herself a murderer.

She shook her head.

*Don’t think about it.*

She walked as fast as her legs could carry her back into the kitchen, where the rags were still boiling. Rey turned off the stove, staring blankly at the wet linen strips floating in the pot.

*Now what?*

She couldn't think. Her mind was starting to shut down. Every time she had a thought it flew away, and the room was starting to spin.

*There is a man dying on the library floor. You can freak out about it later.*

The harsh words did nothing. She started gasping, bending over as black spots floated into her vision. She fell to her knees, shoving her head down and forcing herself to breathe deeply.

*In.*

*One.*

*Two.*

*Three.*

*Four.*

*Out.*

*One.*

*Two.*

*Three.*

*Four.*

She repeated the sequence until her vision began clearing and she could take a deep breath without the urge to vomit or scream.

Forcing herself up, she grabbed a bowl and used the wooden spoon to fish the linen strips out, placing them inside. She started to leave before realizing that the hot water could still come in handy. She placed the bowl of linen strips on top of the pot and grabbed the handle.

Rey forced herself to walk slow and steady, trying not to drop everything. The walk back to the library felt like an eternity. Water spilt over the side of the pot, dripping onto the floor. She didn't care as long as she didn't drop everything.

When she finally got there, she set everything down carefully. Untying the chemise from around Ben's arm, she peeled it away carefully, blood still seeping slowly from both ends of the wound. Rey gulped as panic threatened to overwhelm her again but she forced it down.

With shaky hands, she grabbed one of the wet linen strips, using it to carefully wipe around the wound. Her breath whooshed out when she saw how big the hole was. If they could have left this hell hole dimension, she would have taken him to the ER, if for nothing else, then for stitches. She briefly wondered if there was a sewing kit somewhere, but dismissed the idea. She could barely handle cleaning the wound. There was no chance she would be able to stitch it. She tossed the used strips on the floor. The rug was ruined anyway, so it didn't make any difference.

Only once the wound was clean did she realize she would need to use something dry. She couldn't wrap a wet cloth around a gaping wound.

She looked around helplessly. She shouldn't be doing this by herself. It was too much. She was only nineteen. What did she know about caring for a bullet wound?

Before she even knew what was happening, tears spilled over her eyes and her breath caught on a sob. Pulling her knees up she rested her forehead against them, wrapping her arms around her legs as great wracking sobs finally burst through.

It was too much. She had only been there for several days and she had been hit, forced into marriage, raped, constantly at the mercy of a man who was clearly insane and who was probably going to end up dying on this rug because she *shot him*. Rey didn't even recognize herself anymore. She hated guns, and yet here she was fixing a bullet wound of her own making.

"Are those tears for me?" Ben's voice was so weak and raspy, Rey almost missed it.

Her head snapped up. Brushing the back of her hands across her eyes, not even caring that he saw her tears, she scrambled towards him.

"Are you alright? Don't try to get up. I haven't bandaged the wound yet and I don't want it to start bleeding again. Are you alright though? You're really pale. I think you lost a lot of blood. I couldn't find anything to bandage your wound with so I had to boil the water and then find something to use as bandages and so I tore up one of my chemise's because it's made of linen and then put the strips into the boiling water to sanitize them and used most of them to wipe the blood off your arm, but then I realized that I couldn't put a wet cloth on a gaping bullet wound — though thankfully the bullet went through your arm so I didn't have to do surgery — and I just lost it and now you're awake and are you alright?"

The corner of Ben's mouth twitched and Rey had a feeling he was trying not to laugh.

"Can my dear wife be concerned for my welfare?"

Rey sighed, rolling her eyes. "You can't just be nice, even on your deathbed." She sat back. "Why do I even care? Thanks for reminding me you're a colossal douchebag."

Ben started to sit up and then winced, the little color in his cheeks draining completely. Rey sat forward again pushing his shoulder.

"Don't sit up!"

Ben sighed, falling back again. "I have to get up sometime."

"Well, you're not getting up now." Rey looked around again, trying to figure out what she could use as a bandage. Looking down, she realized her nightgown was made of linen as well. She tore it off her head, hardly noticing this left her buck naked as she ripped the ruffled hem from its seams. Tossing it aside, she knelt down, a quick glance at Ben telling her he either passed out again or was closing his eyes to conserve energy.

His movement had caused his wound to start seeping blood again. Rey grabbed the last linen strips from the bowl and wiped it up. Then she quickly folded hem, wrapping it around Ben's arm and tying it into a knot. She had no idea how tight it was supposed to be, but tried to make it tight enough to at least stop the bleeding. Ben probably wouldn't be able to use the arm for quite a while.

“Ben.” She whispered his name, although she didn’t know why. She needed him awake. She didn’t think she could get him up the stairs, but she could at least try to get him onto the sofa. He didn’t respond to her whisper, which meant he had probably passed out again. Well, she might as well clean up the mess. She picked the bloodied rags up off the rug and tossed them in the pot of water, setting the empty bowl on top.

Only then did remember she was completely naked. Setting the stuff down, she grabbed her nightgown, unsurprised to see bloody fingerprints all over it, and pulled it over her head. Picking up the water and bowl, she walked to the kitchen. Not knowing what to do with the rags, Rey left them in the pot in the sink. Turning around she saw that in her panic she had ransacked the kitchen. Drawers and cabinet doors hung open, various utensils littering the floor, looking like a tornado had passed through the room.

She would deal with it later. She walked towards the stairs, exhaustion clawing at her. She would need to bring down some blankets and pillows if Ben was going to sleep comfortably on a couch, though she wondered how comfortable he would be, given his height. Until he could manage to walk up a flight of stairs, however, he was stuck down on the bottom floor.

Climbing the staircase felt like trying to climb a sand dune, as if the stairs were shifting under her. She grabbed the banister wearily, using it to help pull her up the steps. When she finally reached the top, she paused, only then realizing she had no idea what door led to Ben’s room. He’d been sleeping with her the past couple nights and before that she hadn’t heard so much as a footstep from him.

Pulling open the first door she found, she saw a quaint little room, obviously for guests. Shrugging, since it hardly mattered where she got the blankets and pillows from, Rey walked over, pulling the quilt and pillows off the bed.

Tucking the pillows under her arm, Rey dragged the quilt behind her as she turned to head wearing back down the stairs. She stepped carefully, no hand free to grab the banister and her knees threatening to buckle at any moment. Exhaustion clawed even harder at her, but Rey pushed it away. It was probably just from her adrenaline crash and shock.

When Rey entered the library once more, she was brought to a stop in the doorway by the carnage in the center of the room.

*There’s so much blood.*

Rey swallowed around the tightness in her throat, forcing herself to look away and walk over to the couch instead. Stopping in front of it, Rey stared, taking in the very not-comfortable looking couch. The top and sides were ornately carved wood and it couldn’t be more than five feet long. She pitied Ben at that moment. He was in for some uncomfortable nights.

She tossed the pillows onto the couch, dropping the quilt off to one side. Turning, she paused, wondering how she would ever be able to get him onto the couch if he didn’t wake up.

Sighing, she walked over, ignoring the desire to simply curl up in a ball on the floor. She squatted down, looping her hands under Ben’s arms and pulling. Rey strained, gasping as she took slow step after slow step backwards towards the couch.

*How much does he weigh?*

By the time she had traveled the ten feet from the center of the room to the couch under the window, Rey had broken out in a sweat from the exertion. Once she had him there, she tried to gently lay him down. There was no way she would be able to get him onto the couch. She had barely managed to drag him over to it. Until he woke up and could help her hoist him up there, Ben was stuck on the floor. Rey grabbed a pillow, gently lifting his head and sticking it underneath.

She frowned at how different he looked. He looked much younger in his sleep, no frown lines marring his skin, no snarky smirk. His lips were parted and Rey had the uncomfortable realization that Ben's lips looked extremely kissable. She had spent so much time irritated with his face, that she had never noticed how good-looking he actually was. The realization was extremely unsettling.

Reminding herself of all that this good-looking man had put her through the last several days, Rey shook herself, grabbing the quilt and laying it over him.

She turned, intent on going to clean herself up when her gaze snagged on the bloodied rug. Groaning, she walked over and began rolling it up. Thankfully the blood had not seeped into the wood below. Picking up the rolled rug, Rey huffed under its weight and turned towards the door, knocking into a sideboard table.

"Shit."

She turned more carefully, trying to angle the long rug out the door without hitting anything else. She headed towards the front door, the rug becoming heavier with each step. She stumbled when the end of it hit another side table and dropped it. It hit the floor, partially unrolling.

Rey sighed, exasperated, fighting the desire to both punch a wall and start crying. Instead, she forced herself to grab an end of the rug and tugged it behind her out the front door and down the steps. Without consciously deciding, Rey turned and headed towards the cliff's edge, wanting to test a theory. What normally took her less than a minute to run towards seemed to take forever when she was dragging a rug behind her.

When she finally reached the edge, Rey dropped the edge of the rug and sank down into the grass. Without consciously deciding to do so, she laid on her side, pulling her knees up to her chest and using her hands as pillows. She stared out at the ocean, watching seagulls flying, light glittering on the water.

All of the things she had been trying not to think about hit her at once.

She had shot Ben. Actually shot him. She had nearly *murdered* him. In reality, he may yet die. Rey had shot a man and he may still die. She had pulled a trigger and may have doomed herself to an eternity alone. In fact, this was the first time she had truly considered that there may be no escape from this realm. What if she really was stuck here? What if she never grew old and had to watch the world change around her, powerless to stop it from leaving her behind. She had shot a man. A man who may or may not be her soulmate. What if he was her soulmate? And she had just shot him. What if the universe had sent her to this place to meet Ben, to help him, to stop him from going crazy? What if instead of fighting him, she had just put on the fucking clothes that first night? Would things have turned out differently?

Rey's mind played and replayed these same thoughts as the sun arched across the sky and she stared unseeing at the ocean.

Eventually she came to herself, shivering as the sun began its descent below the horizon. She sat up, groaning as she stretched her stiff muscles. Had she really just disassociated for the entire day, staring at the ocean? She got stiffly to her feet, feeling off kilter as she remembered her reasons for even coming to the cliff. She turned, finding the rug where she had dropped it. She rolled it back up, so she could more easily pick it up. Hoisting it up onto her shoulder, she walked to the edge of the cliff, to the barrier.

Using her remaining strength, Rey hurled the rug.

She gasped when it sailed over the edge of the cliff. She ran forward pressing her hands and face against the barrier as she watched the rug drop to the sand below.

## Chapter 16

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### Chapter 16

Rey stared at the bloodied rug as waves crashed into it, pulling it down the sand and into the water as each wave retreated. Her mouth hung open and she hardly dared to blink, thinking she must be imagining it. How had the rug escaped the barrier? Was it Ben's blood? Maybe it was just that inanimate objects could leave the dimension. Had Ben ever attempted to throw things outside the barrier before?

She would ask him when he woke up... whenever that was.

She kept her face and hands pressed against the barrier, getting vertigo from standing on the very edge of the cliff, the feeling that she was about to fall getting stronger the longer she stayed there. It reminded her of the times she had leaned against the railing at the mall, the fear in the back of her mind that the railing would fail and she would plummet down to the first floor. She had thought she didn't have to worry about that in this place, but now she wasn't so sure. Maybe if she leaned hard enough and long enough against the barrier she would fall through. She could survive a fall to the beach couldn't she?

Questions shot through her mind rapid-fire, faster than she could even process them. If only she had Google. Or Wikipedia. Or really any access to anything that held scientific information from the twenty-first century. What she wouldn't give for all her physics books. Stephen Hawking could probably have figured out a way out of here in a couple hours.

Eventually, when the sun was had completely disappeared below the horizon, she pushed away from the barrier, turning and walking back towards the house, her mind still buzzing with questions. She had left Ben alone on the floor for hours. She felt guilt creeping up her spine at the thought of leaving a dying man alone for so long. Her stomach roiled, nausea hitting her at the idea that she might walk in to find a corpse on the library floor.

She closed her eyes.

*Don't think about it. He's fine. He's alive. You're not a murderer.*

She took a deep breath and continued towards the house. Grasping the handrail, Rey pulled herself up the steps, into the front door. Each beat of her heart felt like it was trying to break itself free from her ribcage.

She swallowed down the gorge that threatened to force its way out as she walked towards the library. Spots in her vision alerted her to the fact that she hadn't taken a breath since entering the house. She gasped, inhaling sharply.

She closed her eyes again, trying to center herself. Forcing herself to breathe slowly, she finally set foot inside the room.

"Come to see if I'm dead?"

Though he had spoken softly, Rey jumped, a hand flying to her chest. Ben remained where she had left him on the floor. His coloring was still gray, his lips pale, and his voice had come out weaker than she was comfortable with.

Swallowing again, she walked over and knelt next to him, his eyes tracking her movements.

“I was getting rid of the rug,” she said. “You bled all over it.”

A puff of air escaped Ben’s mouth and Rey thought it might have been laughter. “I’ve hated that rug for over one hundred years. Good riddance.”

The urge to apologize hit her out of nowhere, but she swallowed it down. Why should she apologize? She had reclaimed a bit of herself by shooting him, even though killing him had never *really* been her intent. The longer she sat staring at him, however, the stronger the urge to apologize became, her guilt threatening to choke her. She gritted her teeth, refusing to apologize or acknowledge her guilt.

*He deserved to be shot.*

Ben watched her through narrow eyes, the emotion in them telling her that nearly dying had not lessened his sense of anger or betrayal.

Her heart squeezed at the thought that he might hate her.

She exhaled sharply. What was going on? She closed her eyes, shaking her head.

“If I could interrupt the I’m sure fascinating debate in your head, I am quite parched.”

Rey’s eyes opened at Ben’s dry tone.

Without responding, Rey stood and went into the kitchen. The man had nearly bled to death, and had been left on his own while she spent the afternoon nearly catatonic. She supposed she would be thirsty too.

In a daze she picked up a glass and filled it at the sink. Walking back to the library, Rey knelt down once more. Ben tried to push himself up and then fell back wincing.

Rey rolled her eyes. “Don’t be a moron. You can’t sit up. You probably don’t have enough blood to fill your body as it is, and your arm needs time to heal.”

She put a hand under his head, pointedly not noticing how soft his hair was, and gently lifted his head as she put the glass to his lips. She tipped it gently, trying not to spill it down his neck. He gulped greedily, nearly finishing the glass before he fell back with his eyes closed, as if gulping water had drained what little strength he had.

Rey set his head back down and went back into the kitchen, opening the pantry. If he was going to get better — and she still wasn’t one hundred percent sold on that idea, but refused to think of being stuck alone — he would need more red blood cells. Since she didn’t have a clue what his blood type was, she couldn’t exactly try to transfuse with her own blood. The best option would be to feed him as much iron as she could get in him. She pulled down canisters with beans in them and walked back out, setting them on a counter. She walked over to the refrigerator-type thing where the meats were kept. She supposed since everything



replenished over night anyway, she never had to worry about getting food poisoning from the meat. Unless they were bad before that is.

Opening it, she wrinkled her nose as she pulled out a chunk of beef. Maybe she could make some sort of meat and bean stew.

She snorted. *You can't even make oatmeal and you want to make soup from scratch?*

Sighing, she set the meat down and continued trying to find the fixings for soup.

Several hours later, she finally had something loosely resembling a soup. She was no chef, but the meat and vegetables were cooked and it was salty. Unless she managed to find some cookbooks, Ben was just going to have to deal.

She ladled the soup into a bowl and filled another glass with water. Her stomach was growling and she thought about eating first before she fed him, but no matter how much of an asshole he was, she couldn't make herself eat before a dying and/or starving man.

She carried the bowl and water back to the library. The house was eerily dark and quiet. None of the lamps had been lit since Ben was always the one to do so. Thankfully there was a full moon sending weak light through the windows. Rey struggled not to shiver as the thought of being alone in this large house for eternity clawed at her mind. She forced herself to take deep breaths as she padded through the dark house, still in her bloodied nightgown.

Entering the library, Rey could only see the shadowy outline of Ben on the floor. She took slow measured steps towards him.

"Ben." Her voice barely registered as the eerie quiet made her heart speed up in fear.

Kneeling carefully, she set the bowl and water on the floor.

"Ben," she whispered a little louder. She reached out to shake his shoulder, but snatched her hand back when he turned towards her blinking slowly.

"Are you a dream?" Ben's words were slurred. Something about his tone frightened her, sounding too close to death.

"What?"

"Am I dreaming?" He blinked slowly again.

Rey grabbed the water glass. "Here. Drink this. You're probably dehydrated."

She put her hand on the back of his head again, resisting the urge to run her fingers through his silky strands, and tipped the glass to his lips. He drank less eagerly than he had before, and Rey wasn't sure if that was a good or bad thing.

Setting the cup aside, she leaned closer, so that she was hovering over him. She needed to get him to the couch before feeding him. She had a feeling he might not have enough strength to do both.

"Do you think, with my help, you could move to the couch?"

He blinked once, seeming to take awhile to process what she said.

"If this is a dream, then that means you love me back."

Rey sat back, blinking rapidly.

“What?” Her voice came out sharp, echoing in the shadowy darkness.

Ben watched her with a wrinkle between his brows, as if he were trying to parse out a puzzle.

“If I’m dreaming,” his words were becoming more slurred, “then you love me back. You always love me in my dreams.”

Rey stared, no idea how to respond to that. It was certainly not something he would have said to her if he weren’t missing half the blood in his body.

What did he mean by “always”? She had only been there a handful of days. How many dreams could he have had? Maybe he meant those weird dreams, like the ones she had been having.

She shook her head. That had to be what he was talking about. He meant in the dreams of them in all different places that she loved him.

Moving back to him, she asked again, “Do you want to stay here on the floor or can you move to the couch?”

He seemed to be taking longer to process her words, but eventually dipped his head once. Rey leaned down, placing her arm under his shoulders. “I’m going to help you sit up first.”

A second later, he nodded again. She gently pulled him up, huffing since he was still mostly a dead weight. He gasped, groaning as he lifted his hand in slow motion to cover his wound. Rey was glad for the darkness so she couldn’t see exactly how pale he was.

“Ok.” She swallowed, trying to figure out how she would get him on his feet. “Ok.”

He turned slowly to look at her. “Will you kiss me?”

Rey pressed her lips together. “No.”

He nodded once. “Not a dream then.”

“Focus,” she said. “I’m going to keep kneeling. I want you to put your arm around my shoulders and get your feet under you. Then I’ll stand up for the both of us.”

Ben blinked once.

“Ready?”

He slowly put an arm around her shoulders, pulling his knees up as if in slow motion. Rey put her arm around his waist, trying to help him get his feet underneath him. It took several tries and way too long, with Ben acting as if he were moving through water, but finally he was teetering on his feet.

“Ok. I’m going to stand up.” When he did so, Rey started to try to stand up.

Easier said than done.

“Ben,” she gasped from the effort, “c-can you help me please?”

He didn't respond and she glanced over, cursing when she saw his chin lolling against his chest. She slapped his cheek hard. He blinked and slowly lifted his head.

"You have to stay awake. I can't carry you."

"You're so beautiful you know."

Rey ignored the weird flutter in her stomach.

*For fuck's sake. Don't forget he's an asshole, Rey.*

"Push your fucking legs up," she said, choosing not to respond to his declaration.

He pushed upwards weakly, but it was at least enough for Rey to get her own legs underneath her and stand up.

"I used to wonder what you'd be like." Ben's voice came out breathy as they took slow steps towards the couch. Rey stumbled when Ben failed to move his feet.

"Focus! Move your feet."

Her voice echoed in the room again, his words rattling her more than she cared to admit.

"I assumed because you are my soulmate that you would be a lady of good breeding." Ben started to laugh but ended up coughing as they reached the couch and Rey dropped him onto it. He groaned as he fell to his side. Rey pulled his legs up for him, once again wondering how he'd rest well, since he was basically crammed with his knees to his chest just to fit on it. But beggars couldn't be choosers. Really, he was lucky she was scared of being alone in this place, of becoming a murderer, or she might have just left him on the floor.

She sank down to the floor, leaning against the leg of the couch. The ordeal had left her winded and feeling like she'd just done five hundred squats.

When she caught her breath, she looked back at Ben and then jumped when she saw him watching her. She had assumed his silence meant he had passed out again.

"You hate me." His voice was little more than a whisper.

Rey snorted. "Yes, I do." She ignored the guilt clawing at her over the admission.

Why was she feeling guilty anyway? She did hate him.

This was so stupid.

She pushed herself up.

"I'm going to bed. I'll leave a cup of water for you. Use it wisely."

"I thought you'd love me as much as I love you."

Rey barked a laugh. "You don't love me. You're probably delirious from lack of blood flow to your brain."

Ben shook his head, moving like he was in slow motion. "I do love you. I've loved you since before I knew you."

Rey pinched the bridge of her nose, anger rising with each word out of his mouth. “Then you don’t know what love is. I don’t know what fantasies you’ve been having for the past however many years, but if you loved me, you wouldn’t have hit me, or starved me, or raped me, or any of the other many things you’ve done in the span of the last few days.”

By the time she finished, she was speaking through her teeth, trying to remind herself she shouldn’t punch a dying man. This was good. A good reminder that whatever head games he was playing, whatever the fuck was happening to her in this place to make her want to forget everything he’s done, he was still her rapist. He always would be and she would do best not to forget that fact.

## Chapter 17

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### Chapter 17

*She was a whore. A whore named Rey sent to pleasure a man named Kylo Ren. She had heard the tales of his victories, of his use of a lightsaber.*

*He tells her doesn't want anything from her, but won't send her away. He seems to care that Cato would harm her if he did.*

*She's lying on the bed, half asleep when she feels something brush her mind. She doesn't like it, can feel him drawing up memories. Without knowing how she does it, she shoves him out.*

*He takes off his mask and she's surprised to see such a handsome man beneath.*

*He tells her of the force. She doesn't believe she has it.*

*He tells her to eat, but doesn't eat himself. She feeds him instead. He makes her eat once he's taken a bite of everything.*

*He's a strange client.*

*He's the first person to show her such kindness.*

*He tells her he'll free her.*

*He takes off her collar, disables the alarm.*

*She tries to repay him and realizes he's a virgin.*

*She tells him he needs a teacher and begins her instruction.*

*He asks her to teach him how to pleasure her. He's a quick study.*

*Sex with him is different than every other time she's lain with a man. She sees inside his mind; she finds out his real name. Somehow the act has forced a bond between them, a bridge between their minds.*

*He teaches her about the force.*

*Cato refuses to sell her. Kylo teaches her how to bend Cato to her will, to get him to agree.*

*She walks out in nothing but Kylo's cape, suddenly free of the life she was sold into.*

*He broke her chains, now she will help him break his.*

*Rey woke slowly, the dream fading as she opened her eyes. Her brows drew together, momentarily confused between dream and reality, a strange yearning pulling at her, a desire to help Ben break free of his chains. Turning over, she blinked rapidly as reality came crashing back down.*

*She was alone, in a strange dimension, caring for a man she had shot.*

She frowned at the disappointment that coursed through her. She hated these dreams. They always muddled things, making her care about Ben, even if only for a few moments.

Sighing, she got out of the bed, slipping on her tank top and shorts. She had started wearing them around the house since she didn't have His Royal Asshole telling her to wear a dress.

She pulled her hair back into a low ponytail as she descended the steps. She had developed a routine in the ten days or so since shooting Ben. Wake up, make breakfast, eat and take some to Ben, change his bandage, spend time throwing things out of the barrier trying to figure out why they could get out and she couldn't, et cetera. The domesticity in particular rankled. She felt like somehow Ben had gotten his way, but what else could she do? She had to eat and if she wanted him to live — still somewhat debatable now that the shock had worn off — she had to feed him too.

The day after had been terrifying, waking up to find Ben with a raging fever and the start of an infected wound. She had found some liquor and poured that over it, trying to at least kill the surface bacteria. There hadn't been anything she could do for the infection raging inside him except trying to keep him hydrated and fed. The fever had finally broken several days later, but the things Ben had said in his delirium had rattled her. He seemed very convinced of his love for her.

Feeling too raw from her dream, Rey skipped checking on Ben and went straight into the kitchen. She had managed to find a couple cookbooks, but they weren't exactly like working with internet recipes. They listed ingredients but didn't always list amounts and the instructions were for someone who already knew how to cook. It had been a sharp learning curve and Rey had had some really disgusting meals.

But she had finally learned how to make a decent oatmeal. She had located some maple syrup and spices a couple days in and had discovered her favorite combination was dried fruit, maple syrup, and cinnamon.

She wolfed down her bowl, going back for seconds. She had never realized how much energy housework and physics experiments took. She was starving at every meal, even more than usual.

Feeling a little vindictive — still trying to shake off the feelings her dream elicited — Rey kept Ben's bowl of oatmeal plain. He hadn't eaten much aside from broth since his fever. She really needed to start pushing the iron. Nursing wasn't exactly her forte and she wanted to stop it as soon as possible. First, however, she would try to push bland oatmeal.

Walking in with the bowl and water, Rey was unsurprised to find Ben awake. What did surprise her was that he was sitting up, reading.

"I guess you're feeling better."

Ben placed a bookmark in the book and set it on his lap. His color was still very pale, his lips nearly white, making his moles stand out in sharp relief. His hair was dull and greasy from lack of showers. She had given him several sort-of sponge baths in the middle of his feverish delirium, but he hadn't yet been strong enough to move to the bathroom upstairs for a proper bath. She might have to force him to crawl up the stairs soon, though.

He looked at the bowl in her hand, his mouth turning down at the corners. "I'm not hungry."

Rey held out the bowl. "Too bad. You need to eat."

He held out his hand. "Give me the water and go."

She rolled her eyes. Yes, he was definitely getting back to normal. She held the water out of reach and held out the bowl. "You'll get the water after you eat."

Scowling at the bowl, he said, "You're a terrible nurse."

"And you're a terrible patient." She shoved the bowl under his nose. "Eat. I'm sick of doing everything for you."

Ben grabbed the bowl from her and she noted the sheen of sweat above his lip. So, he was pretending to feel better than he was. She wondered if he remembered everything he'd told her. Perhaps she could taunt him with it.

That thought didn't give her the shot of glee she had been hoping for. Instead she felt pity for him.

*This is new.*

She had felt sorry for him being an invalid. He was obviously a control freak, and as a control freak herself, she could understand hating the reliance on her to do everything. But this pity was different. She knew what it was like to keep your emotions close to the vest, and she shuddered to think of admitting feelings she had had no intention of admitting.

She shook herself.

*Do NOT feel sorry for him.*

She told herself this every day because every day that she spent in this hell dimension, it became easier to forget everything he had done to her. She felt drawn to him in ways that pissed her off. She refused to believe they were soulmates, but there was no denying this place was changing her, making her look at him in a new light. She had found herself wondering what it would be like to be alone for so many years, catching herself excusing his behavior as the result of forced hermitism.

Ben still stared at the bowl, not eating.

Rey made a noise of annoyance. "EAT. I'm not picking the fucking spoon up for you."

He glared up at her and she noticed his long lashes. "I'm thirsty."

She glared back at him and pretended she didn't notice he had pretty eyes. "Then eat and I'll give you the glass."

He narrowed his eyes into slits and she brought the glass to her lips, taking a large drink, ignoring the urge to give in to him.

"Every time you refuse to take a bite, I take a drink."

He exhaled sharply out of his nose, but brought the spoon to his mouth, taking the world's smallest bite.

“You are such a toddler,” she said, taking a swallow of water.

“You said you wouldn’t if I took a bite.” He looked dismayed that a quarter of the glass was empty.

“That was half a bite, so I took half a drink.”

“I don’t want food. I want water.”

Rey bent at the waist until she was eye level with him. “If you want water, then. Eat. The. Food.”

She straightened. “And hurry up. I don’t have all day.”

Ben scoffed. “Oh? You have some pressing appointment?”

Rey raised her eyebrows and took a swallow of water. Ben made a distressed sound, glaring at her. His cheeks tinged pink and she smirked when she realized he hadn’t meant to make a sound.

“You give me lip, I take a drink.”

“You’d let me die of dehydration?”

Rey smiled brightly. “If you would just eat, then we wouldn’t have this problem, would we?”

Ben glared at her a second longer before staring back at his bowl.

She didn’t have time for this. She was starting to feel an itchy need to give him the water, to sooth his thirst. She resisted the urge to fidget.

“Ok, here’s the thing. You either start eating in the next five seconds, or I walk out and take the water with me. Got it?”

Ben exhaled sharply through his nose again, but after a moment’s hesitation, he picked up the spoon, making sure to glare at her as he filled the spoon and shoved it in his mouth, making a face as he chewed.

She couldn’t really blame him. Plain oatmeal was practically like eating snot. But at least he was eating.

She glared down at him as he shoved spoonful after spoonful in his mouth, grimacing with every bite. When he was finally halfway done with the bowl, Rey held the water out.

He looked at her with suspicion before carefully reaching for the glass. A strange shot of electricity shot up her hand when his fingers slid over hers and she snatched her hand away. She wondered if he had felt it as well, but he was too intent on downing the entire rest of the glass of water.

Before it was empty, she pulled it away, splashing water down his front.

“You moron. You’ll make yourself throw up.”

“Perhaps if you had let me drink before, then I wouldn’t need to drink an entire glass in one sitting.”



Rey shook her hand, trying to dispel the phantom electricity running through it, the desire to touch him again pulling at her.

She shoved the glass in his face. She had to get out of here.

“Fine. But if you throw up, you can clean it up yourself. I’m not doing it.”

She all but ran out of the library, still shaking her hand.

She ran up to her bedroom, pacing back and forth, trying to ignore the nearly overwhelming urge to go back downstairs and make sure Ben was ok.

*It’s just the stupid dream messing up your head.*

Huffing, she went over to the desk, picking up the quill and sitting in the chair. As usual, the pile of unused paper had refilled itself overnight. She had been trying to draft a letter, something she could toss outside the barrier the next time someone came by. She wasn’t sure what good it would do, but maybe someone could help.

If they believed it.

Writing with a quill and ink wasn’t quite as easy as it seemed in Harry Potter however. Most of her notes were nearly illegible, full of drips of ink, and half-invisible letters. She had taken to writing her ABCs repeatedly, trying to get the hang of it. She was getting to the point that she could finally make it through all the letters of the alphabet without an ink blot.

Halfway through the letter B the tip of her quill broke.

“Fuck.” She tossed the quill aside, irritated. Now she’d have to wait until the following day to keep practicing.

She chewed a nail, feeling restless, her knee bouncing as she tapped her other hand on the desk.

Maybe she just needed to go for a run, clear her head through exercise. She stripped out of her clothes, keeping on her bra and underwear. She didn’t feel like washing her clothes again if they got sweaty. She could always go braless for a few days, however, and she had plenty of other underwear.

She hurried out of the room and down the stairs. She was nearly at the door when she heard Ben call her.

“Rey?”

She paused, torn between the desire to see what he wanted and the desire to quite literally run from her problems.

Eventually she huffed, turning on her heel and marching into the library.

“What?”

Ben blinked rapidly, his mouth falling open. “I —”

Rey smirked, crossing her arms when she realized she was standing in her underwear. He was probably speechless from the aneurism his was having over seeing her almost completely naked in broad daylight.

He held out the glass, his voice hoarse when he spoke. "Water."

She raised her eyebrows at his demand. "Is that any way to ask for something from the person responsible for making sure you don't die of dehydration?"

His eyes traveled down her body slowly and the itchy desire to go to him got stronger. As they traveled back up, she felt as if she had already gone for her run, her heartrate elevated and her body feeling hot and flushed. When his eyes finally reached hers again, she was startled by the force of desire in them.

"Please?"

His soft plea came out half an octave lower, Rey's low abdomen tightening at the sound.

Without responding, she strode over, grabbing the glass from him, careful to keep their fingers from touching. Her entire backside tingled as she walked away, knowing he was watching her.

Once she entered the kitchen, she set the glass on the counter, placing both hands on the edge and bending over, trying to catch her breath. She really needed that run. She was getting turned on by his voice now and that was unacceptable.

When she was certain she wasn't going to spontaneously combust, she pushed away from the counter and filled the glass.

Taking a deep breath to center herself, she walked back to the library. Ben was as she had left him, sitting up on the couch. The heat in his eyes hadn't dimmed in the time she'd been away and Rey's heart flipped as their gazes connected.

She walked over and shoved the glass into his hand, turning and bolting out of the room. She flew out the front door and down the steps. She decided to make a circuit of it, running first to the front gate and then turning to the left. She hadn't even put on shoes, but she didn't care. The grass was plenty soft and she had been roaming around barefoot for the past ten days.

She pushed herself, trying to dispel the ache that began gnawing at her, pulling her towards Ben. She felt magnetized to him, even while she was running, feeling hyperaware of his location in relation to hers. She didn't even know what she wanted, just that she wanted to be near him.

She ran through his litany of sins, reminding herself of the man she was feeling drawn to. But other memories crept in as well, of him saying he loved her, of the way he had wanted her touch when he was delirious with fever, of how he had been most calm when she was near. She began to wonder if she had misjudged him. She hadn't even been alone, but having him in a delirious fever fog had felt like being alone and she'd have been lying if she said the silence hadn't started to get to her.

She shook her head, leaning forward and pushing herself faster, trying to tire herself, to bring on the burning muscle pain that could overshadow her thoughts.

She was just lonely. That's all it was. And, no matter how much it pained her to admit it, Ben had been her first. Her first time and responsible for her first orgasm. She was just

getting sex mixed up with feelings. And then the worry that he would die. It was all adding up to make her think that she was starting to not hate him.

*That's all this is.*

They hadn't even talked about the fact she had shot him, and she had no doubt once he was feeling better, it would be a conversation Ben would want to have.

She needed to figure a way out of here.

Now that Ben was beginning to feel better, maybe she should try to ask him questions. It would probably be tedious trying to get him to tell his stories, but maybe if she knew everything that had led to him ending up in this dimension, she could better piece together what had happened and how they had gotten stuck here.

With a plan of action and screaming muscles, Rey turned back towards the house. She slowed as she neared the front steps, chest heaving as she sucked in air, black spots swimming in her vision. She walked back and forth in front of the house as she cooled down. Once she was satisfied that she wouldn't pass out or become one giant muscle cramp, she walked up the stairs and headed towards the library.

Her slowing heart started speeding back up as she neared the room.

She curled her hands into fists, her nails biting into her skin.

Stepping through the doorway, she paused, Ben looking up from his novel in surprise.

They stared at one another, Rey feeling as if her cooldown had been a complete waste, her chest heaving again.

Ben's eyes traveled down her sweat slicked body and Rey tensed, her breath catching.

Before she was even aware of what she was doing, she was walking, pulling the book out of Ben's hand, and crashing her lips against his.

## Chapter 18

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### Chapter 18

Rey groaned, running her fingers through Ben's hair before grasping it tightly as she climbed on top of him, resting her knees on either side of his hips. Something clicked inside her, some strange tension releasing now that she was near him, kissing him, not resisting the pull.

Ben recovered from his shock quickly, his hands spanning either side of her waist, his thumbs brushing up and down her ribs. Rey nipped at his bottom lip, and he opened up, plunging his tongue into her mouth before she even had the chance to do so. She squirmed, needing more from him, needing him to touch her everywhere. She felt sensitized, as if every atom in her body was pulling her towards him.

Letting go of his hair, Rey pulled away, reaching behind to unhook and pull off her bra. Ben watched her with wide eyes as she tossed the bra away, keeping her eyes on him.

"Touch me," she whispered, pulling his hand from her waist up to her chest. She closed her eyes, throwing her head back and groaning again when Ben brushed his thumb across her nipple. "More, Ben. Touch me more."

Her breath hitched when he moved both hands to her back, gently pulling her forward so he could seal his lips around her breast. Somewhere in the back of her mind she winced at how needy she sounded, at the lewd sounds she made, but she shoved it aside. She would think about that later. Right now, all she wanted was for Ben to give her more. She ran her hands through his hair again, pulling it tightly as she pushed his head closer to her. She was probably nearly suffocating him, but the itching need to be closer refused to abate. He turned his head slightly and latched on to her other breast, his hands curving up her shoulder blades and hooking over the top of her shoulders. He lightly bit down, sending a zing of arousal straight to her lower abdomen as she cried out.

"Ben. Please. More. I need more." She squirmed against him, trying to somehow get closer to him, to ease the ache between her legs. She yanked his head back. He hissed as he popped off her breast and gasped up at her, eyes flashing. She swallowed, nearly trembling from a clawing need to be touched. "I need you to touch me."

Ben's eyes darkened, his irises a thin ring around pupils blown wide, as he slowly ran one hand from her shoulder, down around her waist and into her underwear.

"Unnnnggh."

If she had been in her right mind, she might have been embarrassed at the loud, guttural groan, but all she could focus on were the sensations. She pushed Ben's head back to her chest, and taking the hint, he latched himself back on her breast, swirling his tongue in unison with his finger. She gasped as a pulse of electricity rocked outward from her center. She had never felt anything like this. Not even when she had gotten herself off in the pantry.

She started to shake, nearly sobbing from the need to be close to Ben, even though she had basically become a human koala, wrapping her legs around his waist, her hands gripping his hair tightly. It had to be painful, but he didn't complain. Instead he used his fingers deftly to ratchet up her tension. She was so close, but she could sense he was holding back.

"Please. Please, Ben. Please." She wasn't even fully aware she was talking out loud, that she was actually begging him. That same corner of her brain winced once more, but she continued to ignore it in favor of what promised to be a spectacular orgasm.

He pulled away from her chest with another pop.

"Rey. Look at me."

Rey opened her eyes, looking down at him, frowning at the look on his face. He looked... cherishing.

Before she could fully process this, he used his free hand to pull her towards him, first nuzzling her nose, kissing one corner of her mouth and then the other before finally pressing his lips to hers, his tongue delving inside her the same way his fingers did.

Rey keened when the damn finally broke, squeezing herself tighter around Ben as her vision whited out. She broke the kiss in favor of throwing her head back and screaming, gripping Ben's hair as she tried to keep herself from flying apart. Stars burst like fireworks behind her eyes, like the whole universe was exploding with her.

When she came back down to earth, she found herself limp, her head against Ben's shoulder. At some point he had leaned backward and taken her with him. She wanted to move, to get away from the intimacy — all the concerns she had shoved away now flying to the forefront of her mind — but couldn't get her muscles to move. Instead, she listened to Ben's heartbeat as he stroked his fingers up and down her spine.

*What the fuck just happened?*

Rey closed her eyes in horror, both at how she had acted and at the fact she still wanted to be near him. Some part of her wanted to snuggle closer, to never let go of him. It felt right, being near him. Like this was where she was meant to be.

Then there was the fact that he was basically still an invalid. He wasn't even strong enough to move off the couch to the upstairs bedroom and here she was, making him get her off. Guilt clawed its way up her throat as she pushed away from him, sitting up and staring down with wide eyes.

"I..." She swallowed at the even look Ben was giving her, her eyes catching on how pale his lips were, the general pallor of his skin. 'Shit. I'm so sorry.' She swung a leg over and stood up, backing away and ignoring the pull that somehow felt even stronger. "I don't — I mean — I just don't know what happened. And you're — shit — you're practically half dead."

She snapped her mouth shut to stop the babbling, closing her eyes and breathing deeply. Now she was apologizing. But she shouldn't apologize. Should she? He had certainly done plenty to her without apologizing. Then again, maybe it was good she apologize, to show that she was different than him.

“Rey.”

Swallowing again, she opened her eyes, face heating under the amused look Ben was giving her.

“It’s alright.”

She shook her head, turning and hurrying through the door. She hurried back outside, striding quickly to the cliff’s edge.

She was going crazy. This place was making her crazy. Even now she felt as if she had a string tied around her heart, pulling taut as she walked further away from him. This was not normal. This was one hundred percent fucked up.

*What if he’s right? What if he’s been telling the truth all along? What if we really are soulmates?*

She tried to scoff, but couldn’t quite rid herself of the niggling feeling that it was all true. She pressed her forehead against the barrier, staring out into the ocean, seeing life outside this place, cars driving on the road, boats in the distance.

How could a man born over a hundred and fifty years ago be her soulmate? Why would soulmates be born in different centuries? She exhaled sharply. It didn’t make any sense.

And yet, she couldn’t ignore the fact that she was currently feeling tied on the end of a string, one which was currently pulling her back towards the house.

She huffed again, pushing off the barrier, turning around, and walking back towards the house. She had to get answers. She had to know what Ben knew. She curled her hands into fists, nails biting into her palms. Maybe if she knew what happened to him, she could figure out what they needed to do to get out. She’d have to keep her snark to a minimum though. He thrived on giving vague answers, so she’d need to make sure he was in a good mood so she could wheedle the answers out of him.

Only as she was walking up the stairs to the house did she realize she had forgotten to put her bra back on. She snorted at herself as she hurried up the staircase into her bathroom. She needed a bath after all the running and she *knew* Ben needed a bath. Maybe he would be more willing to talk if they shared a one. Like any man, he seemed happiest when she was naked and with him. She turned on the tap to fill the tub, setting the temperature and then hurrying back down the stairs.

Entering the library, she scooped up her bra, putting it back on quickly. She glanced at Ben and found him asleep, his long, dark lashes brushed his cheek, his mouth slightly parted. He looked so much younger when he slept, the hard lines of his mouth softened. She wondered how old he had been when he got stuck in the mirror. She had assumed he was well into his thirties, but now she was thinking maybe they weren’t as far in age as she had assumed.

She padded slowly to him.

“Ben,” she whispered. He didn’t so much as stir and she once again felt guilt settle in her stomach at the fact that she had overworked him.

She sat carefully on the edge of the couch, but he once again didn’t stir. A lock of hair fell over his forehead and Rey gingerly reached out to push it back, combing her hand through his

hair. It was disturbing how easy it was to forget everything he had done to her, why she had shot him in the first place, when he looked so young and vulnerable.

“Ben,” she said again, keeping her voice low so as not to startle him.

His eyes fluttered open and the love she saw in his eyes caused her to recoil. Just as quickly, however, his expression shuttered, and Rey was once again surprised by the disappointment that coursed through her.

“Rey?”

She withdrew her hand and stood, clearing her throat and avoiding his eyes. “It’s time for you to take a bath.” She crossed her arms, looking out the window. “I’m not giving you another sponge bath.”

At his silence, she looked down at him. His expression gave her the impression he was trying to piece together a puzzle. She sighed, reaching her hand down.

“Come on. Up.”

Ben grasped her hand with his right on, swinging his legs down to the floor and sitting up. He winced, paling even further as he gasped.

Fear coursed through her, and before she even realized it, she was kneeling in front of him.

“What? What is it?” Her eyes roved over his body, trying to find new injuries.

“Nothing. It’s nothing.” He took a deep breath and exhaled. “I’m well.”

“You are not well,” she said, looking at his bandage, thankful to see there was no new blood seeping through.

“I am well.”

Rey scoffed at the stubborn line of his mouth. “For the love of — just tell me where you hurt so I can fix it.”

“I assure you, there is nothing to worry over. I simply haven’t left this couch in days. I sat up too quickly.”

Rey narrowed her eyes before sitting next to him, putting an arm around his waist, and pulling his uninjured arm around her shoulders.

“Fine. Then let’s get going.”

She started to stand, her legs nearly buckling under Ben’s weight. He huffed, his jaw ticking as he slowly straightened his legs, keeping his injured arm clutched to his chest. Neither spoke as they made their way out of the library. When they reached the stairs, Ben stopped.

“I-I need a moment.”

Rey looked at him then, seeing a sheen of sweat on his brow. She nodded as he gasped for air, as if they had been running to the staircase rather than taking painfully slow steps. It had taken them at least five minutes to make a twenty second journey. His arm felt like a lead

weight around her shoulders, clearly using her to stay upright. She subconsciously pressed him closer, trying her best to hold as much of his weight as she could.

After several minutes, Ben finally looked up at the stairs. "I'm ready to proceed."

Rey glanced at him, relief coursing through her when she saw his cheeks and lips had more color. "Are you sure?"

He nodded, stepping onto the first step. It was a painfully slow process, and Rey vaguely wondered if she should have shut off the water before she had gone to get him. Then again, the tub was pretty big, and she didn't hear the sounds of water hitting the floor yet, so maybe it was fine.

When they reached the top, Ben asked to rest again. Rey nodded, leaning him against the wall before rushing into the bathroom. The water had gotten dangerously close to the top, but she had gotten there in time. She pulled the plug to let out some of the water so that it wouldn't slosh on the floor when they got in.

When she returned to the hallway, Ben had his eyes closed, hands on either side of him, as if bracing himself against the wall. Rey hurried to him, ignoring the confusing dismay that shot through her. She wrapped her arm around his waist again, and he slung his arm around her shoulder, the movement seeming to take effort. Without a word they continued towards Rey's bedroom.

Once in the bathroom, Rey sat Ben down on top of the toilet, the only place to sit that wasn't the edge of the bathtub, and began helping him remove his clothes.

She watched him closely as she unbuttoned his shirt, sliding it down his arms as he winced. Color bloomed on his cheeks and she could only imagine how degrading it felt to have someone help him undress. She fought once more to tamp down her sympathy.

"Ok, you'll have to stand to get your pants off."

He closed his eyes, nodding as he pushed himself up. She braced her arm around his waist again to help him, but he shook her off.

"No. I-I can stand on my own."

Rey rolled her eyes. "Don't be a moron. It took you twenty minutes to walk from the library into the bathroom."

He bared his teeth at her, though Rey got the impression it was more due to him clenching his jaw in pain rather than actual ferocity. Snorting, she let go of him.

"Fine. Be a moron."

She stood in front of him, arms crossed as she watched him struggle to push down his pants. When he stopped, halfway bent over and grasping the side of the sink, she huffed.

"You are so stupid." She ignored his indignation as she yanked his pants the rest of the way down. "Step out of them."

When he was finally ready to get into the tub, Rey put an arm around him again. Getting his leg high enough to step over the lip of the bathtub was a challenge, with Rey finally



helping pull his thigh up. Getting him to sink down rather than fall down into the tub was another challenge, water sloshing over the sides when he fell when he was about halfway down.

Once he was finally in the water, he leaned back, closing his eyes and sighing. Rey quickly divested herself of her own bra and underwear.

“Scoot forward.”

Ben opened his eyes, surprise on his face at finding her standing nude before him.

“Whatever for?” he asked, his gaze roaming first down and then up.

Rey crossed her arms to hide the fact her nipples were hardening at his perusal.

“I’m getting in.”

A wrinkle appeared between his eyebrows. “You’ll sit in front of me.”

Rey rolled her eyes. “No. You’ll need help washing.”

Ben scoffed, looking affronted. “I will not.”

Rey grit her teeth. “For once in your fucking life can you not argue with me and just do what I ask?”

Ben crossed his own arms. “I refuse to obey the commands of such a foul-mouthed lady.”

She threw her hands up. “Why do I even bother? Thank you for reminding me what an asshole you are.”

She turned on her heel, stomping towards the door. As she threw it open, however, Ben called out.

“Wait.”

She turned, eyes narrowed. “What?”

She watched a muscle tick on his jaw before he scooted forward, grasping the sides of the tub in a white-knuckle grip. She debated leaving him to literally stew, but the pleading in his eyes cooled her irritation. And piqued her interest.

Sighing, she walked over and got into the tub behind him. She realized only then how much weight he had lost. He was still massive, but she easily fit her legs around his. She pulled him against her chest, urging him to sink further into the tub in order to rest his head against her chest. He closed his eyes and sighed as Rey trickled water into his hair via her hands. They laid there for several minutes, not speaking while Rey ran her fingers through his hair, contemplated her line of questioning, and ignored how right this intimacy felt.

“Tell me about your family.”

She felt him tense around her.

“Why?”

She shrugged. “All I know are the facts in the story, which probably aren’t true anyway.”

“No,” he whispered. “They’re all true. My family was cursed.”

“What do you mean?” Rey started massaging his scalp, not even fully aware she was doing so.

“My grandfather died at sea, my grandmother died in childbirth, my uncle and his fiancé disappeared too, and my father —” He broke off, and Rey could feel him start to shake.

She tried to recall the story. “He died too, right?”

“Yes.” His voice broke on the word.

Rey’s hand paused in her massage as she recalled the rumors in the story. “The rumors were that you killed him. Is it true?”

She bit her lip, not sure which answer she was dreading more. The silence felt like a physical weight, pushing at her chest, making it hard to breathe.

“Ben? Is it true?” She intended to sound sharp, but her voice came out small instead. She knew he was capable of terrible things, but somewhere in the last ten days, something had changed in her, and it felt awful to think that he had killed his father.

Finally, after what felt like an eternity, he spoke, so softly she almost didn’t hear him.

“It’s true.”

Shock pulsed through her body and she made to push him away from her.

“I didn’t mean to.”

She paused at the very obvious pain coloring his voice. Sitting back, she asked, “What happened?”

Ben rested his uninjured arm on the lip of the tub, using his hand to cover his eyes. “We quarreled. I don’t even recall what the quarrel was about, only that it was heated. He —” He cut off, and Rey noted with some surprise that he was shaking. How curious that after all this time, after all the awful things he had done to her, that he was so obviously torn up over having killed his father. She supposed being a rapist didn’t necessarily mean you were also a murderer, but it still felt strange.

After a moment, seeming to gather himself, he continued. “We were arguing and it got heated. He forbade me from doing something and before I even knew what was happening, there was this crackling of energy and blue flames, or perhaps it’s more accurate to call it lightning, flew out from my hands, striking him in the heart.” By the time he reached the end of the story, Ben’s voice was barely audible.

Rey, meanwhile, tried to process what she had just heard. “What do you mean, blue lightning shot out of your hands?”

He sighed. “Just that. One moment we were arguing and the next I felt this energy gathering and shooting out of my hands. I had never seen or done anything like it. And my father —” He paused again, clearly having difficulty telling the story. Rey felt her heart squeeze at how obviously guilty and remorseful he sounded.

He cleared his throat. “My father was dead before I knew what was happening.”

Without thinking, Rey kissed the top of his head, her arms banding around his shoulders as she laid her cheek on his head. She didn't know what to say, so she said nothing. If she wasn't stuck in a strange time-locked dimension in which she was feeling an emotional pull to the man who had forced her into marriage and then forced himself upon her, she would have called him crazy.

"How old were you when that happened?"

There was silence before he answered. "I was not yet twenty-four."

He lifted his hands, wrapping his fingers around her arms, thumbs brushing her skin. "The only person who knew what truly happened was my mother." He spoke almost as if he had forgotten Rey was there. 'I didn't know what to do. I was terrified and the grief was nearly overwhelming. I asked myself what kind of monster I had to have been to have killed my own father. And Bazine,' he scoffed. "Well, I knew I did not love her, but she came from good stock." Rey rolled her eyes at describing his former fiancé as if she were a prized cow. "She wanted nothing to do with me after that day, breaking our engagement mere weeks before the nuptials were to take place."

Rey squeezed her arms, giving him an approximation of a hug. "Were you upset or relieved?"

"Both, I think."

Rey let go of his shoulder in favor of running her hands through his hair once more. It was a little disconcerting how easily it had been for her to get him to open up. She frowned, wondering if she were not the only one being changed against her will.

"What were you like before you came here?"

"What do you mean?"

He groaned on an exhale as she massaged his scalp and she ignored the tightening of her lower abdomen at the sound.

"Just that," she said. "What were you like? I mean, you had to have changed over the hundred-plus years you were here alone."

There was silence but Rey got the feeling Ben was merely trying to recollect his former life.

"I was a naïve, weak, and foolish boy."

"What do you mean?" Rey grabbed the bar of soap, lathering up her hands and running them through his hair. It had been so long since his last real bath that she would probably have to wash his hair several times to get it clean. He shuddered once more as she rubbed the soap into his scalp.

"I was too trusting. I did not even love Bazine and yet my heart was left in ruins at her refusal to marry me. I... I always longed for a family of my own."

Rey paused. "What are you talking about? You had a family." He didn't know what he was talking about. She was the one without a real family.

“No. I mean, not really. My mother was always working on this or that charity. I hardly ever saw her in my formative years. My nanny was more mother to me than she ever was. And my father, well, he spent most of his time doing god only knows what. My mother used to say it was better not to ask what he got up to.” He sighed. “Most likely he was doing something outside the law. However, I had no siblings, no one to play with. I was alone, always.”

Rey’s heart squeezed as she listened to his talking, surprising herself when she said, “You’re not alone, now.”

Ben tilted his head to look up at her, his surprise matching her own. “Neither are you.”

## Chapter 19

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### Chapter 19

*“Are you alright?”*

*Blue sparks. They are soulmates. She’s sixteen and her soulmate is her English teacher, Mr. Solo. She doesn’t even know his first name. She tries not to hyperventilate*

*His mother, Leia, pays her a visit and invites her to dinner. She buys a new dress, wanting to make a good impression. His father teases Ben at the dinner and Rey decides she likes Ben’s parents.*

*Ben notices she doesn’t always have lunch and starts bringing it for her. She had hated him as her English teacher, but she didn’t hate him now. When had that happened?*

*She makes him a present, a bookmark. It’s ugly, but he likes it, and Rey grins, feeling happy.*

*One of Plutt’s men leers at her. She pushes him down, running through the junkyard barefoot to get away. Ben arrives at the hospital, where she got stitches on her feet, looking wild. He scoops her up and sits with her curled in his arms. She feels better, safer, warmer. She goes to live with his parents.*

*She braids his hair and they talk about literature. Later she finds out why he hates his uncle so much. She cries for what he went through.*

*She’s sick. She sleeps through dinner and misses Ben coming over. She starts crying, wanting to see him. Leia offers to call him, but Rey is mortified. Leia calls him anyway and Ben comes by. She’s happy and relieved as they watch a movie together.*

*Rey enjoys spending time with him but can’t help wondering if he only sees her as a kid. She doesn’t want him to see her as a kid.*

*He takes her for a ride on his plane, the Silencer, for her birthday. She realizes she loves him. She kisses him, but he pulls away, tells her they can’t do that. She sobs when he leaves. Now she knows he doesn’t love her back.*

*“Do you hate me?” she says.*

*“I don’t think I could ever hate you,” he says softly.*

*He tries to hurt her prom date and she is livid. She asks him why. He never answers. She tells him she loves him. He tells her he’s going to leave. She calls him a coward.*

*He leaves.*

*She thinks she might hate him.*

*He’s gone a year and she feels nothing but hurt and anger. When he returns Rey takes all of her anger out on him.*

*“I love you.”*

Rey’s eyes flutter open, mirroring the flutter in her heart as the remnants of her dream slowly faded away. It felt real. It always felt so real, but this particular dream had hit a little too close to home. They had been soulmates. She closed her eyes, feeling the phantom hurt at being left behind for a year. That version of Ben had been just as clueless, but so much more chivalrous.

Rey turned to stare at Ben as he slept, rubbing her chest over her heart. She never really got used to how young he looks in his sleep. He looked better now that he had had a bath, his hair regaining some of its luster, curling around his ears and neck. He usually kept it combed back, so she hadn’t realized it was so wavy. Without consciously deciding to do so, she reached over to tuck a curl behind his ear.

The look he had given her after telling her she wasn’t alone had caused a strange fluttering in her heart. It had been disconcerting. Ben had closed his eyes and Rey had abandoned her line of questioning in favor of silently berating herself for starting to develop feelings for the man. She didn’t like finding out more about him, about the person he used to be, about his thoughts now, and didn’t like that she even cared. She preferred when he had been easily boxed in as the man who forced himself on her, a misogynist, and abuser. Finding out there was more to the man left her confused. What would her friends think?

They’d hold an intervention.

She exhaled silently, running her fingers through Ben’s hair. He stirred, making a sound in his sleep as he tried to snuggle closer. It seemed strange that he would be a snuggler, but as she thought back to her first several nights here, she recalled how insistent he had been that they spoon the whole night. She had been too miserable and angry at the time to stop and think about how bizarre that was.

His eyes cracked open, watching her silently as she scratched her nails down his scalp. She held his gaze, his eyes looking almost black in the moonlight. All her thoughts, all her concerns, melted away under his strangely soft gaze. He made no move to touch her, did not so much as twitch, despite the fact their faces were mere inches apart.

Moments from the dream drifted through her mind. The way she had felt drawn to him, how it had ripped her in two to have him gone. It felt similar to how she had been feeling the past ten days, the constant pull to be near Ben. For the first time, she allowed herself to consider the possibility that they truly were soulmates. Though it didn’t make sense, it also was the only thing that *did* make sense. It was the only explanation for why she felt so drawn to him. It couldn’t be just Stockholm Syndrome. It wasn’t emotional. Or at least it hadn’t been until recently. Rey felt like every atom in her body was constantly trying to bridge the distance between them, only happy when she was wrapped up in Ben, near him, touching him.

She slid her hand down his jaw, cupping his face as she leaned closer. His mouth parted and she could just barely make out his pupils blowing wide. She felt short of breath as she inched closer, warring with herself over whether she was really going to do this.

*Are you really going to initiate something?*

She pushed her rational self into the back of her mind and let her body take control. When she finally closed the distance, touching his lips, it felt as if the band around her chest snapped.

She pushed his shoulder, rolling him onto his back, swinging a leg over so that she was straddling him. She licked the seam of his mouth, delving inside, eager for the taste of him.

He groaned, bringing both hands up to her waist, running his hands up under her shirt. Rey pulled away, yanking off her nightshirt, and then captured his mouth again. He ran his hand up her waist to cup her breast. Rey groaned as he kneaded it, sending electricity straight down to her lower abdomen. He hissed when she bit his lip, soothing the sting with her tongue. She ground down on him, needing friction. He was more than ready to supply a means to ease her ache.

He pinched her nipple and she gasped. He took the opportunity to begin kissing down her jaw. She ran her hand through his hair, loving the silky texture beneath her fingers. Her breath quickened when he took her breast in his mouth. She ran her hands down his neck, irritated to find access to his skin blocked by his shirt.

Grasping his hair, she pulled his head back. His eyes flashed when he looked up at her.

“Take off your shirt.”

He started to comply and then hissed in pain.

*Right. Still injured.*

She pulled his hands away and began unbuttoning the shirt, following her hands with a trail of kisses down his chest. Once it was open, she helped him pull his good arm out before scooting back and urging him to sit up. He winced, putting his weight on his good arm as she eased his injured arm out of the sleeve. Once it was out, she threw the shirt to the side, shoving him back down and kissing from his jaw down his chest.

“Rey.”

“Shut up.”

The words had no heat, but she had no desire to ruin this with talking. If she let him talk then her rational side would return and realize that she shouldn’t be doing this. She didn’t want rationality. She wanted to be fucked, had wanted it since he had told her in a feverish haze that he loved her, though she had certainly done her best to ignore the desire.

She paused when Ben grabbed her arm, looking up at him with a frown. He pulled her arm, urging her up. When they were face to face, he spoke, his voice deep and commanding.

“Take off your undergarments and grab the bed frame.”

Her eyes widened, but she complied. Keeping his eyes on her, he slowly slid down the bed, running a hand up the back of her thigh to her backside.

Rey started trembling in anticipation

*Is he going to do what I think he’s going to do?*

“Put your knees here.” He used his good hand to arrange her so that she was hovering just over his face.

She gasped when he grasped her thighs and surged upwards, his mouth moving over her. Her knuckles turned white as she gripped the bedframe.

“Fuck.”

She squirmed, wanting more — more pressure, more contact, more of everything — but Ben seemed to be deliberately holding back. Instinctually, she rolled her hips, tilting her head towards the ceiling, too overwhelmed with sensation to worry about whether or not she might suffocate him. Nothing had ever felt this good. She groaned so loud, she might have called it a shout.

He knew what he was doing.

He brought a hand up to join his tongue, assaulting her with sensation. She gripped the edge of the frame harder, digging her nails into the wood. Her thighs started shaking from the strain of holding herself upright. She was so close. So close.

Her head fell forward resting against the headboard, her hands on either side of her head. She looked down at Ben just as he flicked his eyes up to meet hers.

She fell apart, her vision growing white at the edges. She lost all sense of time as the pleasure rolled through her, helped along by Ben’s deft fingers and tongue. Surely it wasn’t normal to feel like the only thing keeping her from flying apart was her skin, to see galaxies bursting into pinpoints of light behind her eyes.

When she came back to herself, her throat felt raw. Had she been screaming? Her chest heaved as she leaned her forehead against bedframe, looking down at Ben, who wore a smug expression. Despite the fact he had just given her the mother of all orgasms, she considered taking him down a peg.

Instead, she held his gaze as she slid down his body. She stopped when her knees were on either side of his hips, reaching between her legs to grasp hold of him and line herself up. He watched her with eyes wide, panting as she slid down, taking him in. The stretch made her gasp, but unlike previous times, it didn’t hurt. In fact, it was the exact opposite of painful. She paused, letting herself adjust, watching Ben watch her with parted lips.

He lifted his hands to her hips, fingers digging in. The look he gave her made her heart flip. It was pure adoration.

Biting her lip, she started moving, rolling her hips experimentally, trying to find a rhythm. Ben helped her, guiding her hips with his hands. She closed her eyes, reveling in the sensation, like an itch that was finally being scratched.

Ben gripped her hips, pausing her movement. When she opened her eyes, he surged upright, kissing her as his hands urged her to move again, rolling her hips. He slid his hands up her sides to her back, hugging her to him as he assaulted her mouth. Each roll of her hips made her gasp, starbursts of pleasure radiating outward to the tips of her fingers and toes.

Ben pulled back, kissing down her jaw to the juncture of her neck and shoulder. She groaned when he lightly bit down, soothing the sting with his tongue. His fingers trailed down



her side to the space between them, circling his fingers around her bundle of nerves and intensifying her pleasure. She grasped his hair, hardly aware of what she was doing, and smashed his face into her chest as she groaned. The sensations were almost too much, the pleasure almost becoming pain, as she nearly sobbed, needing release.

When she heard Ben hiss, she realized she was holding his hair in a death grip. She relaxed her hold and he took the opportunity to begin laving at her breast again. She increased her pace, her abs screaming at her as she rolled her hips, desperately chasing her orgasm.

“Ben.” She gasped his name. “Ben. I need — I need — Unnnnnngggggg.” Ben lifted his head when she dissolved into groaning, unable to articulate anything.

“What do you need?” His voice was low, vibrating straight to her abdomen, causing her to stutter in the next roll of her hips. He raised both hands to cup her face, watching her with hooded eyes. She raised her hands, grasping his wrists, though whether she planned to pull them away or trap them there, she didn’t know.

“Tell me what you need?” he asked again, his thumbs brushing across her cheeks.

Rey panted, knowing the answer to the question but unsure if she wanted to speak it out loud. Something sparked behind his eyes and he dropped his hands to her hips, halting her movement. Rey whimpered, on the brink. She closed her eyes when Ben leaned forward to kiss first one cheek and then the other, dotting her face with kisses on her eyelids and the corners of her mouth. She squirmed, wanting the movement, needing the friction.

“What do you need, Rey?”

She bit her lip, opening her eyes. “Please.” Her voice broke around the word.

The corner of his mouth twitched as he kissed a trail down her neck, once more biting at the juncture between her neck and shoulder. She cried out as sensation shot straight to her core.

“Tell me what you need Rey, and maybe I will give it to you.”

She squirmed as he returned his hand to her now overly sensitive bundle of nerves. But it wasn’t enough, his touch too light, increasing her tension but not promising any relief. Rey whimpered again, moving her hips again now that his hands were otherwise occupied.

He quickly grasped her waist, halting her movement, and raised his head. “Did I say you could do that?”

Rey huffed, feeling like her nerve endings were on fire and Ben was denying her the water to put it out. “How are you this controlled?” She meant to snap it out, but it came out as more of a whine.

He leaned closer, whispering as he looked at her lips. “All you have to do is tell me what you need and I’ll give it to you. If you don’t then I’ll take care of myself.”

He trailed his hand from her waist back up to her breast, his touch feather light. Rey was breathing like she had just run a marathon.

“I’ll ask you one last time,” he said, the timbre of his voice sending a thrill down her spine. “What do you need, Rey?”

She closed her eyes and spoke the word, her voice barely audible. “You.”

She shivered when Ben whispered into her ear, “Good girl.”

He lifted his hands from her hips and she immediately started moving, trying to chase the orgasm that had started to fade away. Ben put both his hands to good use, as well as his mouth, sucking and rubbing and tweaking in all the right places. She held on tight to his shoulders as, for the second time that night, she fell apart, throwing her head back and definitely screaming this time as her entire body spasmed. Ben grasped her hips to keep moving, drawing out her pleasure almost to the point of being overwhelming.

She leaned her head on Ben’s shoulder, feeling like her muscles were made of gelatin as she tried to keep her hips moving. Ben soon gave a ragged gasp, wrapping his arms around her back and crushing her to him as he orgasmed.

Neither moved to pull away as they both tried to catch their breath. At some point Rey had wrapped her legs around his waist, hugging him like a koala as he ran a hand soothingly up and down her back.

When she finally caught her breath, her rationality came crashing back down on her. What had she just admitted to? And did she truly mean it? Had she started to care for this monster the universe had paired her with?

Except he wasn’t always a monster. It had been well over a hundred years since he accidentally killed his father and the guilt still seemed fresh. His voice had cracked when he spoke of his mother leaving. And he had, in the heat of his fever, admitted to loving her.

*No. This is crazy. You can’t forget everything he’s done just because he gave you mind-blowing sex.*

Except he also had not shunned her for shooting him. Why? Why wasn’t he angry?

She once more contemplated his assertion that they were soulmates. She had to know what made him so certain.

Kissing his shoulder, she pulled away, climbing off his lap. Ben watched her, eyes wary as she laid down, pulling his hand for him to join her.

When they lay facing one another, she ran her fingers through his hair. “Ben... can I ask you something?”

He paused a moment before nodding.

“How do you know I’m your soulmate?”

## Chapter 20

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### Chapter 20

Ben blinked at her, clearly surprised by her question. Rey bit the inside of her cheek, holding her breath as she waited for him to respond. After several long moments, he exhaled through his nose.

“What does the legend tell you?” he asked, though she suspected he already knew the answer.

She thought back to the story, trying to recall the details. “Um... you got it from some man.”

Ben nodded. “Snoke was his name.” His eyes glazed over, and Rey got the feeling he was reliving the moment. “Bazine had left me, and no woman would accept my advances. As I said before, I was a naïve, weak, and foolish boy. I dreamed of a wife, a family, trying to cover the guilt of what happened to my father. Snoke was supposedly a warlock, traveling through town peddling the usual, useless amulets for protection, various concoctions meant to cure one’s ailments or bring one luck.”

He sneered as he continued. “I knew the likelihood he was a fraud was high, and my mother begged me not to waste money on the man, but I went to him anyway. I was desperate.”

He paused, his mouth moving as if he were chewing on his words.

“When I arrived at his tent, he offered me a tarot card reading. According to him, the cards said I was seeking true love and would find it. He told me I had a destiny, and like a fool I believed him. He showed me a mirror, claiming it had the power to show one’s soulmate when the harvest moon reaches its zenith.”

He scoffed, trailing his fingers down the side of Rey’s face. Her heart squeezed at the jaded man before her, so clearly angry with his former self.

“My mother called me a fool. We quarreled that night and she told me no good would come of the mirror. My last words to her—” He choked off, closing his eyes. Rey grasped the hand on her cheek, pulling it away and hugging it to her chest.

“I’m sure whatever you said, she forgave you.”

He opened his eyes, which looked glassy with unshed tears. Rey’s heart squeezed tighter. How strange that she felt so much empathy for him.

Clearing his throat and looking away, Ben continued his story. “I had to wait several weeks for the harvest moon, and in the meantime hung the mirror by the front entry. If nothing else, I told myself, it served a function. My mother and I fought every day over that mirror. She claimed it was sacrilegious, what I planned to do. She wasn’t religious, my mother — that

was more my uncle's obsession — but she attended church and held most of the beliefs, one of which being witchcraft is a sin.”

Ben shook his head, his gaze snapping back to Rey as a rueful expression crossed his face. “I don't know why I'm telling you all this.”

The corners of Rey's curved upward, fascinated by the tale, learning more about Ben in the past several minutes than she had in the two weeks she had been there. “I think it's interesting,” she said. “Go on.”

Ben sighed. “I knew the likelihood that I had been sold a useless item for a very hefty fee was high. Our library contained some volumes on the occult, though I've always wondered how they found their way there. I looked up a method for testing the mirror's validity when the time came and ran across a spell.

“When the night finally arrived, I managed to find some excuse for my mother to leave the house. The ritual I discovered required quite a lot of blood. To be frank, I wasn't entirely certain it wouldn't kill me in the process.

“I stood in front of the mirror, cutting my wrists and letting my blood pool on the floor in front of it.”

“The pool of blood,” Rey whispered.

Ben shook his head as if to clear it. “What?”

“The story,” she said. “It mentioned that you were gone with nothing but a pool of blood in front of the mirror.”

Ben nodded. “Oh. Yes.”

“I can't believe you cut your wrists.” Rey frowned. “That's incredibly dangerous and stupid.”

Ben pressed his mouth into a firm line. “Believe me, I'm well aware.”

Rey rolled her eyes. “Ok, so back to the pool of blood.”

Ben nodded. “I don't recall the incantation exactly, but according to the book the name of your soulmate would appear out of the pool of blood in gold letters.” He pulled his hand out of Rey's, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. ‘I said the incantation and gold letters appeared, floating up out of the pool of blood to hover between me and the mirror.’ He held her gaze with intensity. “Just three letters. Do you know what they were?”

Rey shivered as a chill ran down her spine. “No,” she whispered.

“They were R, E, and Y.”

A pulse of shock ran through her, making her feel as if she were inside a dream. “What?”

Ben nodded, watching her closely. “As the letters were hovering there, I caught movement beyond them. When I looked to them mirror, I saw your face. You were peering at the mirror, much like you were when you came here. I thought for sure you were on the other side. You lifted your hand and when you touched the glass, you disappeared. I ran to the mirror, intent on getting to you, and when I touched the mirror, it at first seemed as if nothing happened. I

immediately looked all over the manor and grounds for you, but you had vanished. It wasn't until I met my mother, and she walked right through me, that I realized something had happened. I tried so many different methods in my attempts to be free of this place, but none worked. It wasn't until years later that I even noticed I had stopped aging."

He paused, closing his eyes a moment before opening them again and continuing while Rey gaped at him, starting to feel dizzy.

"When I saw you two weeks ago, I at first thought I had finally gone mad. You were dressed in a shockingly little amount of clothing, and it wasn't until you turned and gasped at me that I realized my wait was over. The woman I had been spending years dreaming about had finally arrived."

Rey shook her head, trying to wrap her mind around everything Ben had said. "But that's impossible. I wasn't even born yet. My great-great-grandparents probably weren't born yet."

"I'll grant you it does seem unbelievable, but that is what I saw."

Rey rolled over and stood up, pacing to the window and back. "I just..." She put a hand to her chest, feeling her heart fluttering fast. "How is that possible? It doesn't make sense."

"Rey —"

"First of all, why would the universe make you and your soulmate be born in completely different centuries? What, so no one gets to meet their soulmate? You just wander the earth looking for the right person and end up settling for the first person you have feelings for because, guess what, you're one of the lucky people the universe decided to laugh at? Because either you were born too early or too late?"

"Rey —"

Rey was so caught up in her rant she didn't even notice Ben calling her name. "Second of all, I don't even believe in magic. So, all of this is nuts. It's impossible. There has to be a scientific explanation for it. Arthur C. Clarke said 'magic's just science we don't understand yet.' So, to believe some random guy off the street to be able to sell you a magic mirror like you're in some kind of Grimm's fairytale is just idiotic. And for my name to appear out of your blood — which is red — in *gold* letters is also not believable."

Rey threw her hands up and then turned, pointing her finger at Ben, who seemed to be calmly watching her breakdown. "And while I'm at it, it's also completely fucked up that this soulmate bullshit is changing me. You — you hit me, forced me to marry you, and then raped me, and yet less than two weeks later I'm fucking begging you to make me come? I fucking initiate it myself? *FUCK THAT.*"

Ben snorted. "Of course, you resort to crude language. You're not the only one whose soulmate came in below your standards."

Rey laughed, sounding hysterical. "Oh, I'm sorry. Your soulmate says fuck? I feel so fucking bad for you! That is absolutely the same thing as everything you've done to me."

"My soulmate shot me!" Ben glared in her direction.

Rey closed her mouth, crossing her arms and glaring back at him. His point did splash some water on her fire, but Rey pushed her guilt away. "Then I guess that makes us even."

“Even?” He gaped at her. “You tried to kill me, and that makes us even?”

She shrugged. “I’d say it all adds up to about the same.”

A thought occurred to her then, filling her with dread. She narrowed her eyes, her voice sounding deadly calm. “Did you know we would be trapped here when you bought that mirror? Did you trap us here on purpose?”

He looked affronted. “Of course not!”

She watched him. Was he telling the truth? If she hadn’t been living in some weird pocket universe, she would have completely dismissed him as a lunatic. A man with delusions.

She exhaled sharply, rubbing her forehead as her shoulders curled inward. “This is so fucked up.”

“Are you really so unimaginative that you can’t use language befitting your sex?”

Rey’s gaze snapped to him, disbelief coloring her voice. “*Excuse me?*” She threw up her hands. “You know what? I’m done. This conversation is done. You’re a misogynist and a prick, and we’ll end up talking in circles until I get the urge to shoot you again.”

“Why does my wanting you to act like a lady aggravate you so?”

“Why does me cursing aggravate *you* so?” she countered. “Because I don’t fit into some fucking fantasy that you made me out to be when you were stuck alone getting steadily more insane? What did you expect your soulmate to be like when you have a temper strong enough to kill your father, strong enough to beat the woman you supposedly have been pining for for over a century, to starve her, to rape her? Did you really expect to get some meek, genteel woman?”

Ben pushed himself up, wincing and covering his injury with his hand. “Would you stop saying I raped you? I did no such thing. We are married.”

She crossed her arms again, glaring at him. “Let me break it down for you, since your fragile Victorian mind can’t seem to grasp this simple truth. Anytime a woman doesn’t want to have sex with you and you do it anyway, even —” she raised her voice when Ben opened his mouth to reply, “when she is coerced into saying she does, it’s rape.”

“I never coerced you.”

“What the fuck do you call beating and starving me then? I said yes so you wouldn’t hit me or keep me away from meals. It was self preservation on my part and rape on yours. You left me no choice and then pretended to give me one.”

Ben swung his legs around, standing before grasping the bedframe to steady himself. Rey clenched her fists to keep herself from running to help him. She hated this soulmate bond, or whatever the fuck was happening to her. She didn’t want to care about this man. She just wanted out of here. She wanted to go back to college, become an engineer, maybe someday marry and have a family. She didn’t want to spend her life debating the parameters of what qualifies as rape.

She watched, her muscles tensed to flee, as Ben slowly walked around the bed to stand in front of her. As he stared down at her, she felt herself swaying towards him, wanting to be in

close contact. She took a step back, lifting her chin. He followed her, stepping towards her as she continued walking backwards until her back hit the window.

Her heart was racing, but it wasn't fear she was feeling, and she was disgusted with herself. His eyes were hooded in the darkness and she couldn't figure out what he was feeling.

"You were all I had, you know." His voice was low, just above a whisper as he lifted his hand to trace a finger down her cheek. "I was all alone in this place and I only had my memory of what you looked like and the three letters spelling your name to keep me sane." His finger traced over her lips and down between her breasts before he palmed her. She bit her lip to keep from moaning. She had already had two orgasms that evening, not more than thirty minutes ago, and yet she could feel herself heating up, her lower abdomen flipping.

"I fell in love with the only person left to me. You."

Rey's lips parted as she resisted the urge to pant. Her heart felt like it was swelling in her chest at his admission. Yet, she shook her head slowly.

"No." Her voice caught, and she cleared her throat. "No. You don't love me. You love some fantasy version of me."

Ben shook his head, grasping her wrists and pinning them on either side of her head. He was so weak still that she could easily break his hold, but she didn't particularly want to at the moment. He kissed her cheek, making his way to her ear, the tip of his tongue tracing the shell of her ear and making her shiver.

"No. I love the foul-mouthed brat before me, the woman who shot me, who is the other half of my soul. The woman who is the best fuck I've ever had." Rey shivered at his cursing, shocked but also getting far too aroused over a simple word. "The woman who, against all odds, in a world full of depravity and debauchery, saved herself for me." Rey shook her head, opening her mouth to say she hadn't saved herself for him and keening softly instead. Ben kissed her then, his tongue delving into her mouth, tasting her. Rey squirmed as he held her wrists, keeping the rest of his body from touching her as he licked the roof of her mouth.

His kisses weren't fiery, but slow, as if he wanted to prove his statements. She felt like there was a balloon expanding in her chest as she considered the possibility that he truly did love her. She certainly did not return his feelings with the same fervor, but she conceded the fact that she may — against her will — be developing feelings for him as well.

It occurred to her that he was deliberately keeping things from escalating, so she hooked her leg around his thigh and pulled him closer, groaning when she felt him hard against her and rolling her hips. He hissed, pulling away. She dropped her leg as he stepped back, pulling her hand as he walked backward until his legs hit the bed. He sat down, tugging Rey until she climbed onto his lap, facing him. He rested his hands on her hips, thumbs brushing her hip bones.

They stared at one another as Rey tried to regain her footing. They had just been arguing. When had her anger dissolved into enchantment, her heart skipping a beat when gave her a cherishing look?

She ran her fingers through his hair, frowning when she saw sweat beading on his forehead. She pulled back, realizing how pale he was, and scrambled off his lap.

“No. You’re half dead right now, Ben. Why didn’t you say something?”

She pulled a nightshirt on as Ben watch her with his mouth open. “We’re going back to sleep. You need rest.”

She pulled his hand, forcing him up and walking him back to his side of the bed, helping him put on his nightshirt as well, and then forcing him to get back in the bed. She walked back to her side, slipping under the covers. Immediately, Ben put an arm around her waist and pulled her against him. She could still feel him hard against her and did her best not to squirm. She tried pulling away, but Ben tightened his grip.

“Ben, you need to sleep. I’m surprised you have enough blood right now to even get it up.”

He nuzzled behind her ear. “I don’t sleep well unless I’m touching you.”

Rey’s heart gave an odd thump. She didn’t respond, instead trying to calm the flutters in her stomach at his admission. She sighed, pretending to be exasperated. “Ok. Just go to sleep.”

Ben hummed, ticking her ear. She tried to resist squirming, knowing he would only interpret her rubbing her ass on him as a sign he should pick things back up. Thankfully, he was asleep quickly, his even breaths brushing across her ear.

She thought of everything he had said about how he got here. It was eerie to think about Ben bleeding half to death just to see her name. And even weirder that he saw her face in the mirror.

She tried piecing together everything she had learned to try to figure out a way out of this place. Before she could get very far, however, she was back to sleep.

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The next several weeks went much like the first two, with the exception of Ben regaining his strength — and Rey learning how to cook an edible soup and dried beans. Each day that she realized Ben’s color was slowly returning, she felt the weight on her heart lift a little more.

Every night Ben claimed to feel restless, claimed he needed to expend energy, and then fucked her into the mattress. They had started with Rey on top, but as Ben’s strength returned, he started bending her over the bed, and then with her flat on her back with her knees practically at her ears.

Each day that passed, Rey was less and less inclined to feel guilty for growing attached to Ben. She blamed it on the soulmate bond, but even that accusation had lost heat for her. She tried to resist growing closer to him, but the constant pull on her heart, like a string tying her to him, made it difficult. He told her every day that he loved her and she kept her mouth shut. She didn’t know what she felt, or whether she wanted to admit she felt it.

By the time six weeks had passed, Rey was starting to think she was becoming a sex addict. She wanted Ben. All the time. She had even stopped throwing items outside the



barrier trying to figure a way out. Instead she spent her free time getting herself off, getting Ben off, or just plain climbing on his lap and using Ben to get herself off.

Which is how she found herself straddling him in the library, moaning as she bounced up and down, when there was a loud knock on the door.

They both froze, turning to look in the direction of the front door. Rey's eyes widened when another knock sounded, and she scrambled off Ben, rearranging her clothes as Ben did the same.

"Do you think it's just someone knocking on door in the real world?"

Ben tucked himself away with a hiss. "I don't know what else it would be. You're the only person who has come to this place, and you came through the mirror."

She bit her lip, her eyes fixed in the direction of the front door as it was knocked a third time.

"I'm going to go answer it."

She ignored Ben's call as she hurried to the front door, her mind racing in a thousand different directions. What would it even mean if this was someone in their dimension?

She pulled open the door, halting when she saw an elderly man standing before her. He was bald and had many scars on his face. He looked a hundred years old at least, but was standing there without a cane.

"You must be Rey."

Her mouth fell open. "You can see me?"

The man chuckled. "Yes. I can see you."

Before he could answer, Rey heard Ben gasp and turned behind her.

"How can you be here?" he asked, his eyes wide.

Rey turned back to the man as he smiled at her, extending his hand.

"I don't believe we have been properly introduced. You may call me Snoke."

## Chapter 21

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### Chapter 21

Rey gaped at the man. “Snoke?” She shook her head. “No. That’s not possible.”

The man’s chuckled sent a trickle of unease down her spine. “You’ll find a great many things the unenlightened believe are impossible are in fact quite possible... if one has the means.”

She shook her head again. “I don’t understand.”

“How are you even alive?” Ben’s sharp voice startled her. Looking behind her, she saw Ben giving the man a murderous glare.

Snoke smiled, though it didn’t reach his eyes. “Now that is quite a tale.”

“Then tell it,” Ben said.

Snoke clasped his hands in front of him, a strange look in his eyes. “I’d be happy to, if you would invite me inside your humble abode.”

Rey stepped back to let the man by and ran into a wall of muscle. Ben grasped her arms to steady her, but didn’t step backward to let Snoke in. She glanced up, biting her lip at the anger radiating off him. She couldn’t exactly blame him. Snoke was responsible for Ben’s century of solitude, for her own entrapment as well.

“You ruined my life.” Ben sounded as though he were speaking through clenched teeth, his hands twitching on her arms. “Did you know what the mirror would do?”

Rey narrowed her eyes at Snoke, very interested in the answer to that question. Where had he been all these years, and how was he still alive? He couldn’t have been hiding on the grounds, but, so far as she could tell, their little pocket of universe didn’t extend beyond the property line of the estate.

Snoke’s smile widened. “Oh yes.”

Ben shoved Rey aside. “You son of a bitch!” He charged at the old man, but before he could lay a hand on him, Snoke waved a hand, and Ben flew backward, bouncing off the side table under the mirror. Rey’s heart flew into her throat. Without thinking, she rushed over to him.

“Are you alright?”

Ben held a hand across his abdomen, his other hand clasping his almost healed shot wound, and nodded.

Rey turned and glared at Snoke, who had stepped into the house and closed the door behind him. “How did you do that?”

He gave her a condescending look. "As I said, I'd be happy to share the tale." Without another word he stepped over the pair of them and walked in the direction of the sitting room, as if he knew the layout of the place.

Rey turned back to Ben, who winced as he stood. Rey patted him all over, feeling strangely panicky over his fall and potential injury. "Do you know how he did that?" She kept her voice low, glancing over her shoulder to make sure they were indeed alone.

Ben's mouth was pressed into a grim line as he glared in the direction of the sitting room. "No. I haven't the faintest idea what that was or how he managed it. It was like being shoved back by a solid wall."

Rey glanced back again, before turning back to Ben. "I want to hear what he has to say."

Ben snapped his gaze back to her. "What?"

She frowned, looking beyond Ben towards the sitting room. "I want to know how we get out of here, and the best way to figure that out is to hear how he managed to trap us."

Ben narrowed his eyes, as if considering her points, and then gave her a curt nod. She stood and helped him up before they both walked into the sitting room. Snoke was waiting for them, lounging in a chair with his legs crossed and sipping at a brandy. Ben tensed, his hands fisting at his sides. Rey pressed her lips together, walking over to the settee and sitting down.

"I have questions."

She glanced at Ben, still standing in the doorway with clenched fists, and then back at Snoke.

"Yes, I imagine you would."

She crossed her arms. "Do you plan to answer them if I ask? Or are you the type of megalomaniac who enjoys stringing people along."

Snoke sipped his brandy. "Oh, I am most certainly the type of megalomaniac who enjoys stringing people along. It's a good laugh. But in this case, I'll make an exception." He waved a hand. "Ask your questions."

"How do we get out of here?"

Snoke sighed. "I'm disappointed in you. Here I thought you would ask how I'm still alive."

Ben stalked towards her, moving as if he were afraid to startle the man.

"I don't care how you're alive," Rey said. "I want to know how to get out of here."

"But the answer to how you get out of here," Snoke countered, 'can only be explained by first learning how I'm alive.' He smiled into his brandy, taking another sip. "I've been waiting over a century to answer these questions. The least you could do is play along."

"The least we could do?" Ben seethed beside her. "You made a game of my life and you expect me to be grateful? Play along?"

Snoke lifted a shoulder. "I've given you what you asked for. You wanted to know who your soulmate was, and here she sits, right next to you."

Rey put a hand on Ben's arm, shaking her head slightly. He huffed, pulling his arm away from her but keeping his mouth shut. She turned back to Snoke.

"Fine. How are you alive?"

Snoke's smile reminded Rey of the Cheshire cat and sent a shiver down her spine.

"Tell me, Rey —" She started, wondering how he knew her name. "Do you believe in the mystic arts?"

She crossed her arms. "No."

Snoke's smile grew. "Even after everything you've experienced?"

"I believe in science."

He nodded. "Yes. Many people believe the two are at odds with one another. It is always science against religion or science against magic. People believing only in what they can see, despite the numerous phenomena recorded throughout human history. What people fail to realize is that science and the mystic arts are one and the same. I believe you are aware of the Law of Conservation of Energy, yes?"

Rey exhaled sharply. "What does this have to do with anything?"

"I'll take that as a yes," Snoke said. "For our poor Victorian companion, I'll explain."

Rey felt Ben tense beside her and grasped his hand, glaring at Snoke. He merely chuckled into his brandy. Smacking his lips, he continued.

"The energy of the universe is constant. Energy cannot be created and neither can it be destroyed. It simply changes from one state to another. The mystic arts simply help one control the energy of the universe. We don't create it and neither do we destroy it. We harness it for our own purposes."

Snoke paused, as if waiting for Rey to ask him another question. Rolling her eyes, she asked, "Fine. You're a regular physicist. What does that have to do with how you're alive?"

"Why, everything. I have learned to harness the energy of the universe and bend it to my will. I grow no older than the day I discovered the means."

"So, when you were about a hundred and twenty then?"

Snoke's answering smile didn't reach his eyes and she was startled by the intensity she found in them. "Do you know, young Rey, that some people are better suited for the mystic arts than others? Not everyone has it within them to feel and harness this energy."

"Fascinating." She was getting antsy. She just wanted to know how to get out of here and Snoke seemed to be intent on making a spectacle of his answers. She glanced at Ben, trying to gauge his thoughts, but he was glaring at Snoke.

Slowly, she turned back to Snoke. "Ok. So? Get to the part that involves actually answering the question."

Snoke's Cheshire cat grin reappeared. "As I was saying, not everyone has the ability to feel the energy around them. Others, however," he paused, his eyes flicking over to Ben, 'have an unusual sensitivity to the energy around them.' He looked back at Rey. "People such as myself can find new and creative ways to harness this energy."

He addressed his next question to Ben. "Were you aware of the power within the Skywalker bloodline?"

Ben's knuckles whitened as he spoke through his teeth. "No."

Snoke chuckled. "No? And yet your library contains volumes on the mystical arts. You yourself have used them to perform spells."

Rey narrowed her eyes. Where was he going with all this? And when was he going to get to the point?

"Did you know, young Solo, that I met your grandfather?"

Ben's expression cleared. "What?"

Snoke nodded, sipping his brandy. "Yes, we met at one of his ports of call. He told me all about the wife he had left behind, expecting a baby. He was hopeful to return before the baby was born." He lifted his gaze to Ben's, and Rey thought she spotted glee in his eyes. "Such a pity I had to kill him before he could return."

Ben gasped. "What did you say?"

Snoke waved a hand. "Oh, I didn't slay him by something as crude as a blade or gun. I sensed a power in him, the same power that I had. You see, not many years prior I had discovered that the key to my longevity lay in harnessing the power of those sensitive to this energy, this force. I could have kept your grandfather alive, sure, but the power would have been much less potent, perhaps not enough to keep me alive for long. Killing a man, however, releases all that energy. All I required was a good storm, and Anakin's energy was mine for the taking."

Ben surged upright. "You killed my grandfather so you could continue living your abomination of a life?"

Rey merely sat, staring at Snoke with her mouth open as the man chuckled.

"Oh, it took much more than your grandfather. As I said, energy can be neither created nor destroyed. Your grandfather's lifeforce began running dry after several decades. Finding another person with a concentration high enough could have taken longer than I had to live. But these things are generally hereditary. So, I simply located Anakin's family, the wife and child he left behind... Or should I say children?"

"My uncle." Ben spoke the words flatly. Rey tugged on his arm to pull him down as she turned her glare on Snoke.

"So what?" she said. "You just keep killing people so you can stay alive?"

Snoke nodded. "I did consider killing both the Skywalker heirs, but I'm afraid your mother's energy signature was much smaller than your uncle's."

“That’s why he and his fiancé disappeared?”

Rey could tell Ben was a moment away from violence. She slid her hand into his, and some of the tension left his body.

“Why did you kill his fiancé?” she asked.

Snoke gave her a look as if she were stupid. “I could hardly have the girl running to the police, now could I?” He examined a fingernail.

Rey rolled her eyes, trying to hide how truly terrified she was to be discussing the murder of Ben’s family. “Ok great. So, Ben’s family is strong in this force, and you killed a couple of them, because you’re hellbent on immortality. Wonderful. Get to the part that’s relevant for today.”

Snoke smiled, as if she had said exactly what he had hoped she would say. Dread fell like a rock in the pit of her stomach, sending a shiver down her spine.

“Well, you see, the problem with killing to harness the power is that it dissipates within a few decades. This is hardly conducive to longevity, and quite frankly, it’s a chore to locate the right person, and figure out how to murder them without getting caught. In the space between Anakin and Ben, I had been doing extensive research, trying to find a way to siphon the energy instead of gathering it all at once. That’s where this mirror comes in.” He nodded at Rey. “I’m sure you’re familiar with the concept of the multiverse.”

Rey nodded, frowning.

“I had to kill many people to gather the energy required, but in the end, I was able to create this little bubble within the multiverse.”

Rey felt as if she’d been dropped into an ice bath. Ben similarly seemed to be working through shock, though she wondered how much of the science he understood.

“Once I had the universe created, I simply needed to find a way to trick your dear lover here into using it. You can imagine my delight when I discovered all the rumors surrounding his father’s death and his relentless search for love.” He waved a hand. “Really it was almost too easy. Once he was trapped here, I could siphon his energy at my leisure. Because the dimension I trapped him in was timeless, his energy was thus boundless.”

“So why are you here, then?” This question came from Ben. “If you found the perfect method for siphoning magic, why are you here?”

Snoke lifted a finger. “I’m so very glad you asked. Several weeks ago, I felt a disturbance, a great rush of energy. It was unlike anything I had experienced before. Not even your grandfather’s energy was so strong. Glancing in here, I ascertained that your soulmate had finally arrived, though I daresay she wasn’t quite the woman you hoped she’d be? It appeared she had shot you.”

Rey cringed inwardly as she thought of that day and all that had changed. What was Snoke getting at? She was chilled to the bone at the casual way he talked about murdering people and shuddered at the realization he could somehow see into this pocket universe. She didn’t want to think what else he could have seen.

“You see,” he continued, looking very much like he was enjoying himself, ‘soulmate energy is very strong. The universe sinks vast amounts of energy into tying two souls together.’ He looked over at Rey. “And the energy your lover expelled when he was near death was stronger than anything I had felt.”

Snoke took a long drag of his brandy, finishing the glass and rising to pour himself another. Rey glanced at Ben, noting the confusion in his expression, his fists still tightly clenched. When Snoke took his seat again, Rey expected him to continue talking. When he didn’t, she huffed.

“So why are you here now?”

“Ah yes. That is the question,” he said, taking a swallow of his brandy. “You see, the thing I discovered when you shot young Solo here, is that the energy derived from a person killing their soulmate is beyond anything I’ve encountered. By my calculations, the volume of energy expelled by such an event would be enough to fuel my life for a thousand years at least.”

Another chill ran down Rey’s spine. “Wh-what are you talking about?”

Snoke set down his glass, standing and reaching into the inside of his jacket. He pulled out a pistol and pointed it at her.

Panic washed over her as Ben jumped up and charged at the man. Just as he had done before, however, he waved a hand and sent Ben flying into a wall. Snoke kept his hand up as Ben struggled to pull away from the wall, an invisible force holding him there.

He flipped the gun around, pointing the handle at her. “All you have to do to be free of this place, Rey, is shoot your soulmate.”

Rey’s mouth turned to sandpaper as she stared at the weapon, then Snoke, and then Ben, who’s eyes were wide with panic.

She stood slowly, eyeing Snoke, waiting for him to flip the gun back around and shoot her, before taking halting steps towards him. She heard Ben saying her name, but ignored him as she reached for the gun.

Her heart pounded in her ears. She could see her name on Ben’s lips as she lifted the gun. Could she do it? Was Snoke even telling the truth? She was miserable here. Or... mostly miserable. She missed technology, her phone lying dead on a table in her room. She didn’t think she could handle spending who knew how long in this place, with nothing but the same food, the same clothes, the same person, day after day after day. Her hand shook as she pointed the gun towards Ben. She raised her other hand to steady herself.

She took a deep breath, holding it as she contemplated what she was about to do. She was going to shoot Ben — her soulmate — to save herself.

Her hands started to shake.

She exhaled sharply.

All she had to do was pull the trigger and she was free.

Her finger twitched.

*You'll be free to go back to your life, Rey.*

She closed her eyes so she wouldn't have to look at Ben, at the betrayal in his expression.

Swallowing, she tried once more to pull the trigger.

*Just squeeze and you can leave here. You won't be charged with murder, because this place doesn't exist in the real world. No one will have to know.*

She opened her eyes, immediately snagging her gaze with Ben's. Tears welled in her eyes.

*Just do it!*

With a sob, she lowered her arm.

She couldn't do it. She couldn't kill Ben.

Snoke tsked. "I'm disappointed in you, Rey. I thought surely you would, after you nearly killed him before." He grabbed the gun out of her hand as she sucked in air.

"Well, I guess I can offer you the same chance then, young Solo."

Rey's head snapped up. Snoke was crazy. There was no way Ben would shoot her. He had been going on and on every day and night about how much he loved her.

"I'm sure you must be questioning my sanity," Snoke said as he flipped the handle of the pistol towards Ben. 'I have seen how much you've debased yourself with your professions of love, never hearing it in return. But, if you do not shoot her, you will never escape this place. Only I know the way out and I won't reveal it.' He turned his gaze to Rey, and she felt like ice ran down her spine at the look in his eyes. "But." He drew the word out, and Rey felt the urge to roll her eyes at his theatrics. "If you do this one simple thing, simply shoot Rey, you can be free. You can walk right out the door and experience life in the twenty-first century.

Rey gasped when Ben reached for the weapon, cocking it and pointing it straight at her.

"Ben." Her voice was audible, but she began to understand the look of betrayal he had given her. She felt as if her heart were being ripped in two. She couldn't hear anything more above the sound of blood rushing in her ears.

Her lips formed one word. "Please."

She felt as if she were living in a dream, reality beginning to fuzz around her. She saw Snoke's lips moving, but had no idea what he was saying.

Unlike her, Ben's hand was steady as he pointed the gun at her, staring at her unblinkingly.

She could see the muscles in his jaw moving, looking as if he were chewing on his words. Snoke continued speaking, likely urging him on, but Ben just stared.

She frowned at the look on his face, unable to decipher the emotion behind it. She saw his lips move, forming two words.

"I'm sorry."

Rey squeezed her eyes shut.

A loud bang rang out and Rey jumped, her eyes flying open.



She looked down at herself, running her hands all over her body to find the wound. She didn't feel like she'd been shot.

"Rey."

Rey looked up at her name and then gasped. Ben lowered the gun as Snoke crumpled to the ground, a bullet wound in the middle of his forehead.

She gasped, her chest heaving as she simultaneously tried to breathe and cry. Ben dropped the gun and rushed over to her, gathering her in his arms. She rested her cheek on his chest, grasping the sides of his shirt.

"I thought you were going to do it," she whispered, her voice cracking.

Ben pulled away, glaring at her. "I waited over a century for you. Why would I give you up after a few weeks?"

Rey gaped at him. "Because you want to get out of here. You've been stuck here, watching the world go by, and you had a chance to be free —"

She gasped as a thought occurred to her. Snoke had created the mirror and he was dead. She rushed around Ben and to the front door. She hurried outside, down the steps, and ran to the gate. She slowed as she neared, before reaching out a hand.

She sighed when she met with resistance. She pressed her forehead against the invisible wall, her mind working in overdrive. Snoke had made the mirror and he was dead. Why didn't the wall around the estate collapse?

She pulled away.

*The mirror.*

Turning, she raced back to the house and up the steps. Ben was watching her from the doorway and jumped aside as she brushed past him. "The mirror. That's got to be the way out."

Taking a deep breath, she reached out, placing her hand on the glass of the mirror.

Nothing happened.

"No no no no no." She stamped her foot. "NO."

She pulled a hand through her hair, trying to think. There had to be a way out.

"Blood."

Both she and Ben had needed blood in order to come through the mirror. She had pricked her finger on the railing before she had touched it.

She raced to the kitchen, ignoring Ben's call after her. Grabbing a knife, she used the pointed end to prick her finger, hissing at the pain. Blood bloomed, running down her finger as she threw the knife in the sink and raced back to the front door.

She barely stopped herself from crashing into the mirror as she slammed her hand onto the glass.

Nothing happened.

“NO!” She picked up a figurine and threw it. She looked around, seeing Ben calmly watching her.

“Why isn’t it working?” She paced back and forth in front of the mirror, sucking on her finger, the coppery taste of blood filling her mouth.

She paced for who knew how long, but she could think of no other alternatives, no other ways to exit this realm. Frustrated, she picked up the vase of flowers and threw it as hard as she could at the mirror.

It shattered.

Both she and Ben gaped as the glass shards dropped to the floor, the only noise in the room little tinkling sounds as the smaller pieces fell to the ground. She turned to look at Ben, seeing her own wide eyes mirrored back at her.

Looking around, she saw that they were still in the nice Victorian home, rather than the dilapidated twenty-first century version. But maybe...

She raced back out the door, flying to the end of the walkway. She stopped, breathing hard as she stared out the gate into the world beyond. She lifted a hand once more.

Resistance.

“No.” Rey banged her hand against the barrier as a sob left her. “No, the mirror is gone. The mirror is gone. The mirror is gone.”

She slid down the invisible wall, chanting the same four words.

It should have worked. Snoke was gone. The mirror was gone. How could they be stuck here still?

Tears trailed down her cheeks. She squeezed her eyes closed, sobbing openly.

“Rey.”

Ben’s soft voice startled her, so near to where she was sitting. She opened her eyes and found him squatting beside her.

She turned to him. “It should have worked. We should be free.”

Ben pressed his lips into a hard line but didn’t respond.

“Did you know?” she asked, afraid to hear the answer, afraid that he had trapped them here on purpose. “Did you know killing him would trap us here?”

Ben stared at her a moment before scooping her into his arms.

“Let’s get you a bath and bandage your injured finger.”

Rey knew she should protest, knew his refusal to answer was as damning as a confession, but weariness swept over her, making her slump against him. She couldn’t think about forever, couldn’t think of missing the world outside.

Closing her eyes, she rested her head on Ben's shoulder, tears running down her cheeks as he carried her up the stairs and into the house.

## Chapter 22

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### Epilogue

#### *Ten Years Later*

Rey yanked on her bindings, her wrists and ankles burning as she tugged, biting her lip and screaming. The blindfold over her eyes kept her from seeing what was happening, and a large hand on her stomach kept her from twisting away. Ben hummed, his face buried in between her legs.

“Please, Ben.” She whimpered as spikes of pleasure radiated outward. “Please, let me come.”

He had already brought her to the brink and denied her an orgasm four times. Every muscle was taut, like she was a bow, being pulled back and back and back but never released. The blindfold only served to heighten every sensation, and her inability to move her arms and legs, to do something — anything — to relieve her need added to the torture.

She felt him pull away and sobbed, shaking her head. “No. No, please. I-I can’t take it anymore. Please let me come. Please. Please let me come. Please.”

Ben’s deep baritone voice held a thread of amusement. “Well, since you’ve begged so nicely.”

Rey bowed off the bed when he added his fingers to his tongue and her orgasm immediately crashed through her. It seemed to go on forever, Ben deftly coaxing out every last bit of pleasure as Rey’s entire body turned to gelatin.

Her chest heaved as he kissed a trail down her inner thigh to one ankle, pulling the binding free and gently rubbing the sore area. Rey whimpered again, feeling like her body had doubled its nerve endings, every touch sending spikes of sensation through her body, the feeling almost painful. Ben’s hand landed on the knee of her other leg, his fingers trailing down to her ankle and pulling it free as well.

He ran both hands up her legs and she felt the bed dip. She twisted her hips, closing her knees. She was too sensitized. She couldn’t handle anymore.

“Rey.” Ben’s voice held a note of warning. “Is there a word you’d like to say?”

She bit her lip, knowing one word would stop this game they were playing. Behind her blindfold she squeezed her eyes shut. She felt like one more touch would send her very atoms flying apart. Yet she refrained from speaking the word that would stop him.

After several long moments, she shook her head. Her heartrate picked up when he grabbed her hip, pulling it back down, his hands prying her knees apart. She felt him settle between her legs, the heat of his body radiating off him as he kissed a trail up her stomach, pausing to swirl his tongue around her nipples, sucking gently before resuming his path upward. Rey

was breathing hard, an aching emptiness in her lower abdomen. She couldn't stop herself from sobbing, her emotions on the surface after being teased for so long.

Ben kissed a trail to her ear. "What's wrong?" His voice made her shiver. She wrapped both legs around his waist, locking her ankles together.

He knew what she needed. He always knew what she needed, and he always made her say it. He enjoyed taking her to the brink of her sanity before finally giving her what she begged him for. Rey knew enough from her life before to have set up a safe word, but had never used it. In truth, she loved the way Ben pulled her apart before piecing her back together.

She tugged her wrists lightly, wanting to run her hands through his hair. She blinked behind the blindfold, wishing she could see him.

"Please, Ben. I need you."

She hardly had time to finish speaking before Ben's lips were on hers, his tongue delving into her mouth. She tried to lift her head, to do something to be closer to him. She shivered at the passion in his kisses. Ten years alone together and the passion had yet to wane. In fact, Rey felt like every day her passion grew. Some days she couldn't get enough of him, like an insatiable hunger that sex somehow only strengthened.

Some days she thought her sanity was questionable, that the stasis they were stuck in was responsible for her inability to think about anything but how much she wanted was Ben. Her hands grasping the kitchen counter, his hand on her hips as he pulled up her skirts. Her back against a wall, her legs wrapped around his waist. Her mouth around him, staring up at him as he groaned, his hands tangled in her hair.

They both had wondered why she never got pregnant, since they should have had a child every year with how they fucked like rabbits. Rey's theory was the stasis was to blame. Neither of them grew older and thus no new life could grow within her.

She often kept her mind from wandering too far down the road of blame for why they were here. In the space between Snoke arriving on their doorstep and Ben shooting him, he had figured out the way out of this place was through Snoke. The man had created the realm and only he had the key out. But Ben was selfish in his desires, and while he had admitted to feeling remorse over taking her choice away, he had also admitted that he would have done nothing differently. He loved Rey with a singlemindedness that almost scared her. She knew that love meant caring more for your partner's wellbeing than your own desires, but Ben was unabashedly selfish when it came to Rey.

She couldn't even daydream out loud about being back in the real world without Ben throwing her over his shoulder, tying her to the bed, and torturing her with orgasm denial until she admitted she needed and loved him the same way he needed and loved her.

Secretly, as much as it made her question her own morality and self-worth, she loved when Ben tied her to the bed, loved the sweet torture, the time he took with her. He didn't just fuck her into the mattress. It wasn't a furious coupling — which Rey suspected was part of his special brand of torture — but a slow, sensual dance, making love to her, showing her how much he cherished her, and forcing her to admit the same.

She wrenched her head to the side, gasping for breath as Ben kissed down the column of her throat.

“Please. I need you inside me.” Her voice was breathy and high pitched, her throat sore from the earlier screaming.

He kissed the hollow at the base of her throat, his tongue darting out. “Do you now?”

She tugged at her wrists, clenching her hands, her nails biting into her palm as she tilted her hips, rubbing herself against him. “Yes.”

His hand came to her hip, keeping her from grinding against him as he kissed lower, sucking on her overly sensitized skin. “I don’t know if I should reward bad behavior.”

Her breath rate increased as he once more sucked her breast into his mouth, his tongue swirling around her nipple. She gasped when he lightly bit down.

“It’s not bad behavior to say I wish I had electricity, television, and internet.” She tilted her head back, trying to see through the tiny space between the blindfold and her nose.

Ben pulled off of her, climbing back up her body. She felt his breath on her ear. “Any desire you have that involves leaving this haven and forcing me to share you with the world is bad behavior.”

He punctuated his statement by thrusting into her. Her gasp turned into a groan as her body stretched to accommodate him. She shoved her heels into his back, tilting her hips up to force him in further.

“Fuck.”

Rey smirked. Her greatest achievement these last ten years had been getting Ben to agree to a bet. When he played his little game of tying her up, he would have to grant her a wish for every curse.

She squeezed her legs tighter, keeping him from moving. “I believe you owe me a wish.”

He chuckled, the low rumble a strange conduit that ran from her ear straight to her lower abdomen. “And what does my wife wish?”

“The blindfold.” Rey said it quickly on an exhale, her legs starting to shake with the effort required not to cant her hips.

She blinked rapidly when he pushed the blindfold up, tossing it away. As always, the love and possessiveness in his eyes was like a physical blow to her heart. She bit her lip as she stared at him.

Ben started moving, staring into her eyes as he did so. The moment felt more intimate, more real, more loving now that she could see him. He was an absolute prick about ninety percent of the time, and sometimes Rey was certain hated her soulmate, but the looks he gave her when he was kissing his way down her body, when his mouth was buried between her legs, when he was buried inside her, made her heart flip and her abdomen clench.

The pace he set was torturously slow. She moved her hips, trying to pick up the pace, but he sat back, shoving behind her knees, simultaneously bending her in half and pinning her

down, her ankles on his shoulders. With her hands still tied, she was completely at his mercy.

Had she not spent the past decade with him, she might have thought he was angry, his expression stony, but she caught the mischief in his eyes as he stared down at her.

“Asshole.”

The corner of his mouth twitched, but his eyes narrowed. She bit the inside of her cheek in anticipation for his punishment.

“Is that any way to ask your endlessly patient husband for a favor?”

Rey snorted at “endlessly patient”.

“I think,” he said, turning his head to kiss her ankle, “maybe I should keep this lovely pace. Good wives and genteel ladies never use such language.”

“I never —” she groaned loudly as he hit that spot inside her, trying and failing to move her hips. “I’ve never claimed to be either of those things.”

Ben’s lips twitched. “Indeed.” He thrust hard, jolting her, forcing out a exhale of surprise. Rey thought, somewhere in the back of her mind, she should be embarrassed by the quantity and volume of all her groans, but couldn’t stop the guttural sound from leaving her lips as Ben snapped his hips, hitting just the right spot inside her.

“Please, if you love me at all, pick up the pace.” She had meant the words to have more heat behind them, but Ben chose that moment to begin rubbing circles between her legs again, so her voice came out high pitched and breathy instead.

She felt like every circuit was fried, every snap of Ben’s hips sending a shock radiating outward. She could feel her emotions threatening to overflow and tried to keep the tears at bay. She hated this part of Ben’s torture. She wasn’t sad — fucking far from it — but after so long, so much time spent denying her orgasms, she had no other way to rid herself of her heightened emotions.

As it always did — Ben seemed to wait expectantly every time — the tears convinced him to show her mercy. He dropped her legs from his shoulders, pulling away, and reaching up to untie her hands, kissing the inside of her wrists where they were reddened from her pulling. Rey ran her fingers through his hair, her eyes closed as he kissed her tears. His hand trailed down her side before he lined himself back up, sliding in at the same time he kissed her, his tongue delving inside her mouth.

He set a furious pace now, and Rey suspected he had barely held on as he had drawn out her torture, waiting until she gave him what he wanted. Rey nearly bowed away as he hit that spot repeatedly, screaming into his mouth as her orgasm crashed over her. Ben pounded into her, once more wringing out as much pleasure as he could before his pace stuttered, and he collapsed on top of her, his lips by her ear.

After a few long moments, in which they both tried to catch their breath, Ben rolled off her onto his back. She scrambled to snuggle closer to him, Ben opening his arms as she laid her head on his chest, intertwining their legs. A strange side effect of his sex torture was Rey’s all-consuming need to be hugged and cuddled in the aftermath. He combed his fingers

through her hair as she breathed deeply. He knew better than to try to run his hands down her back, her overly sensitized skin needing some time to recover.

“I love you.” The words were so soft, she nearly missed them.

She squeezed her arms together at the vulnerability in his tone. “I love you, too.”

It wasn’t long before they both fell asleep.

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“Remind me again why we’re purchasing this place?”

“I told you. I want to restore it.”

Rey looked up from her novel at the sound of voices and car doors slamming. Her eyes widened as she recognized the voice. She glanced at Ben before setting her novel aside to run up the stairs, two at a time, for the paper and ink in her bedroom.

On the one-year anniversary of Rey’s sudden disappearance, Rose had come back, bringing flowers to lay by the gate. Rey had taken that opportunity to write and throw a note outside the barrier where Rose would see it. As was to be expected, Rose had assumed it was some prank. It had taken some strategic messages and a long explanation, spread over several years, but eventually Rose had believed Rey. Though it was an extremely tedious and annoying way to communicate, it had breathed life into Rey to have someone other than Ben to talk to.

Ben, also as to be expected, had not liked this development, had not liked Rey’s happiness over talking to anyone from her former life, but had eventually become resigned to the fact that Rey wasn’t happy with only his company. It had been Rey’s idea for Rose to purchase the home, though she hadn’t expected Rose to plan on restoring the place.

Rose’s husband, Finn, knew nothing of Rey’s imprisonment in another dimension. She and Rose figured they would ease him into it. Even though they wouldn’t be able to interact directly, Rey was looking forward to having them in the house, to the thought of children and future generations being present.

Ben did not like this idea. He had at one point threatened to daily burn all the paper in the house. Rey had responded by sucking him off and forcing a promise from him not to do so.

She had also reminded him, repeatedly, that he would still technically have her all to himself. When Rose had mentioned restoring the household, Ben had insisted Rey make sure that they keep Rey’s — really hers *and* Ben’s — room unoccupied so they could have some modicum of privacy. The household occupants may not be able to see Rey and Ben, but they didn’t want someone waltzing in while they were having sex, or worse, lying in bed with them.

Rey flew back down the steps and out to the gate. She scribbled a quick note, letting Rose know she was there. She tossed it outside the barrier.

Rose bent down, picking up the note and smiling at Rey’s welcome.

“What’s that?” Finn tried to grab the note from Rose, but she held it away.



“Just a piece of trash.”

Finn arched an eyebrow. “Then why can’t I see it.”

Rose smirked. “It’s private trash.” She grabbed his hand, pulling him through the gate.

“This house is creepy and probably should be torn down.”

Rose smacked Finn’s shoulder as Ben lazily wandered down the steps, his expression stony as Rose and Finn bickered good-naturedly about Rose’s plans for restoring the home.

Rey rolled her eyes. “You’ve had me alone for ten years, and since you destroyed our only way out of here, will have me for eternity. What does it matter if they restore the house?”

Ben crossed his arms, glaring. “I don’t want heathens invading my space.”

She snorted. “Heathens? You’re the one who’s murdered two people. If anyone’s a heathen, it’s you.”

Ben grabbed Rey’s chin, forcing her head up. She glared at the ire in his eyes as he said, “A fact you never let me forget.”

She batted his hand away. “Can you for once not be an asshole?”

“I will if you for once act like a lady.”

Rey flipped him off. “Then I guess we’re both screwed.”

Ben’s hand snapped out, grabbing her wrist and pulling her flush to him. “You are an insufferable harlot of a woman.”

Rey smiled sweetly, batting her eyes at him. “And you’re a fucking misogynistic prick.”

Ben started to lean down, a wicked glint in his eyes, when Rose and Finn walked back around to the front of the house.

He made to let her go, but Rey stopped him, smiling as a wicked thought entered her mind.

“Have you ever tried voyeurism?”

His eyebrows rose, glancing from the chattering pair back to Rey. “It’s not voyeurism if they can’t see us.”

Her smile widened as she saw the lust in his eyes. “Fine. Public sex then. They can’t see us, but we can see them.”

“The universe laughed when it gave me you as a soulmate.” His fingers flexed on her waist, his eyes hooded as he bent to kiss her neck.

Rey hooked a leg around the back of his, gripping his hair as he sucked on her neck.

“And it will continue laughing for eternity.”